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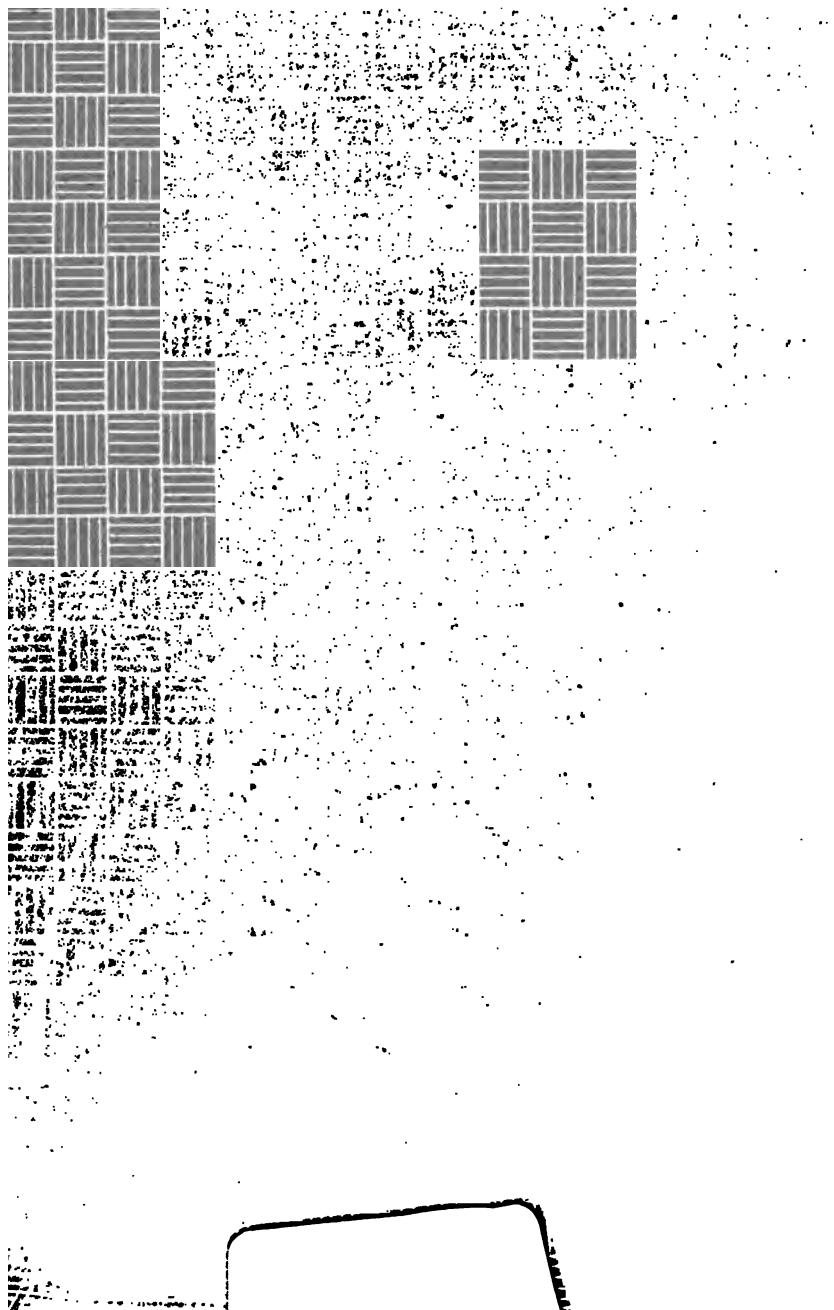
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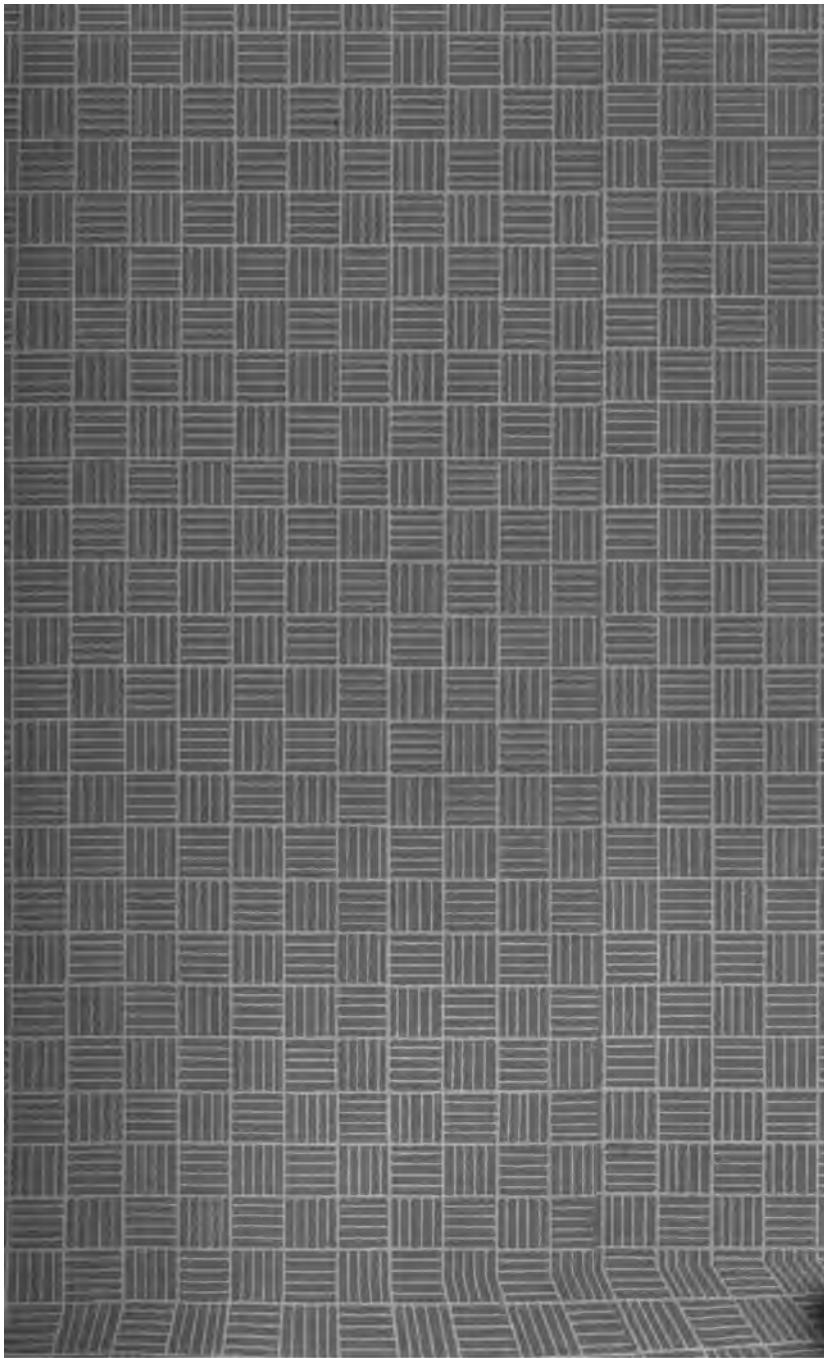
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MY IMPERIALIST NEIGHBOUR

AND OTHER STORIES

BY HENRIETTA A. DUFF

AUTHOR OF "HONOR CARMICHAEL," "FRAGMENTS OF VERSE,"
"VIRGINIA," ETC.



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At the request of many friends and readers of her former published works, and with the kind permission of the Editors of the various Magazines in which they have appeared, the following Stories are here collected and offered as a further tribute to, and remembrance of, their much lamented Author.



CONTENTS.



	PAGE
MY IMPERIALIST NEIGHBOUR,	9
F'RONA !	47
'NUELA: A BASQUE CHRISTMAS STORY,	75
DULCIE BRAND: A SKETCH IN BLACK AND WHITE,	109
RALPH CAMERON'S MODEL: A ROMAN GHOST STORY,	159
IN SIGHT OF THE MOUNTAINS,	181
RACHEL: A PORTRAIT,	207
FROM FONTAINEBLEAU,	229
THE BETROTHAL OF JOYEUSE,	241







MY IMPERIALIST NEIGHBOUR.

CHAPTER I.

BARBARA.

Then slowly, slowly, she came up,
And slowly she came nigh him,
And all she said, when there she came,
"Young man, I think ye're dying."

Cruel Barbara Allen.



HE came leaping out on the balcony like a bright flame. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were dancing. Stars were shining in her beautiful dark hair, and a gold chain was round her neck. She wore a floating white dress, and in her hand she held a fan of peacock's feathers. It was evidently some gala attire she had donned. She swept past a miniature hospital for diseased plants and maimed animals, set up in one corner of the balcony; leant over the iron railings, and peeped into my room, singing out in her pretty clear voice—

“Paul has come, *Monsieur Smeet*—Paul has arrived.”

I dragged myself up off my sofa as I heard her voice.

“I make you my felicitations, Mademoiselle,” I began. Then another voice interposed—an older, a sadder, a wearier one—

“Come back, *ma fille*—it is not *convenable* to run about like that. Come in at once. Paul will have completed his toilette directly.” And a pale, thin, almost transparent hand appeared round the young girl’s slim waist, and drew her gently back into the room.

This was not the first time she had come springing out on the balcony. The first time had been nearly a year ago—soon after her arrival in England, or, at least, soon after her advent in the house next door. She had worn a black dress on that occasion, and a long, loose, dust-coloured cloak thrown over it. The stars were in her hair, too—a black velvet ribbon, studded with them, fastening back the heavy brown plaits. Instead of the fan, she then held a bunch of seedling grasses in her hand, and a little dog, following her out, stood beside her on the balcony.

It was a blazing hot afternoon in June. The bricks in the houses opposite were being baked afresh; and the scorching London pavement gave

one an idea of what the pleasures of walking must be like in that place which is said to be paved with good intentions. All the world and his wife (the wife most emphatically) were disporting themselves in the park ; drawn thither by the sleek, smooth-paced steeds of fortune and fashion, or by the more flighty Pegasuses of vanity and ambition. There seemed to be no one left at home, even in dull, unfashionable De Vere Street, Pimlico (which, like many similar companions, hangs like a bit of dingy fringe to the richly-flowing skirts of Belgravia), except my next-door neighbour and I.

My neighbour was on this occasion unconscious of my presence. I had an unfair advantage over her. I could watch her from where I lay on my sofa ; but she could not see me without absolutely peeping in at my window. She stood there, with her back to the hot brick wall, and the bundle of grasses half-slipping out of her hand, while her beautiful dark eyes slowly strayed up and down the empty street. Meanwhile, a poor little blackbird in a wicker cage, nailed up to the wall (he had but one leg, and was half-starved sometimes, and otherwise neglected, I used to think ; but he managed to sing cheerily enough, all the same), twittered, and chafed, and beat his wings against the bars, and nearly dislocated his little neck in the vain endeavour to get at something within his sight, though beyond his reach.

But the girl appeared to be in a sort of dream, and took no notice of the bird.

“Bárbara, Bárbara,” I said to myself, watching her. I had taken it into my head that my neighbours were Italians. And then something in her attitude, in her floating dress, and the stars in her hair, the grasses she held in her hand, which served for a palm, the hot brick wall behind her head, and, above all, the eyes, looking out wonderingly, wistfully, on a grim, blank world, reminded me of the famous St. Barbara at Venice; and I spoke the words again—this time aloud. She started as I spoke, and the dog began to bark. She caught the little creature up in her arms, and looked at me in a half-shy, half-*farouche* way.

“How did you know my dog’s name?” she asked, almost fiercely.

“I did not know it,” I replied, closing my book, and crawling to the window. And then, amused at her quaint, defiant air, and the manner in which she held the little animal up in her arms, as if she suspected me of being a dog-stealer, I added, “I thought it was your own name.”

She laughed—a little trickling laugh like water. Her mind was evidently relieved.

“My name is Alma,” she said, in her pretty, foreign way, clipping off the ends of her words, as if they were the stalks of flowers.

"Alma!" I repeated. "That is not an Italian name, surely?"

"I do not know whether it is an Italian name or not," she answered, with careless pride. "I am French."

French! That was it, then. My neighbours were refugees from the once happy land of love and mirth, now distracted by foes without and fiends within. It was enough, was it not? to account for the wistful look in the girl's eyes—for the sad, weary, *abattu* air of her mother—perhaps even for the sharp face and sharper tones of Thérèse, *la bonne*. I liked the French for old time's sake. I had fought by their side in the Crimea. I had taken their part in the Prussian war. I had not given them up even now, when they had given themselves up to the horrors of the Commune. I believed their very faults, their very sorrows, to be the result of their impulsive, warm-hearted natures. Even in individuals, does not generosity sometimes tend to extravagance, and the love of liberty to eccentricity and licence? *Il faut avoir les défauts de ses qualités.* They will right themselves in time: their virtues and their vices will resume a proper equilibrium. In this sympathetic frame of mind I hobbed out on the balcony, prepared to say something *compatissant* to the young French girl.

"Are you very ill?" she asked abruptly, looking

at me. It was the first time for many years I had tried to walk without my stick, and I was naturally rather shaky.

“No, indeed—I am well,” I answered. “Better, at least, than I have been for the last sixteen years.”

“Sixteen years!” she repeated, catching at the words. “Why—that is just the number of years I have been in the world. Have you been ill all that time?” and the bright eyes grew dim at the thought.

“All that time,” I replied. And indeed I was truly sorry for myself.

“Ah! how grieved I am,” she said, in her pretty broken English. And then she clasped her hands together, and looked me full in the face. “But you had many *plaisirs* before you were ill, had you not? You are old now—your hair is grey. Sixteen years is not very much when one is old, Mamma says.”

“Sixteen and nineteen, how many are they?” I ask, amused.

But she declined to make the calculation.

“You are older than Paul, anyway,” she said, decisively.

“And who is Paul?” I was just beginning to ask, when the shrill voice of Thérèse made itself heard on the balcony, from the depths below—

“Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, faut rentrer. Voici une télégramme. Madame ne revient que demain——”

When Fanny, my married sister, with whom I lived, returned from her afternoon drive (she had a little Victoria, with a pair of high-stepping ponies, and gilt harness and bells, for the sake of which pretty things, I fancy, we resided in dingy De Vere Street, and Brooke, my brother-in-law, toiled all day long at the Temple), I related to her my adventure on the balcony. Both of us had been interested in our neighbours ever since one extremely wet day in May, when we watched them descend from a cab, the mother and daughter, and the sharp-faced Thérèse, with the little dog, and the one-legged blackbird in a wicker cage, at the house next door. My sister, indeed, had always been far more curious about them than I, though now she chose to sneer at the scantiness of my information.

"Her name is Alma, and she is sixteen years old, and her mother is away. I think I could have found out all that, without even speaking to her," said my sister, contemptuously. "Indeed, I do know more about her already. Sprigett told me this morning that the lady was a French widow of the name of d'Aubusson. She has lately lost her son, and seems to be very poor. They have *fricandeau de veau* for dinner one day, and cabbage soup the next, and stewed plums and——"

My sister gave me a few further details of domestic economy, but I did not heed them. The name of

d'Aubusson had arrested my attention. It seemed to drag me back, suddenly, through long years of suffering, past the wound, and the fever, and the dreary hospital days, and the long nights spent in the trenches, or lying on the damp ground, where the seeds of rheumatism and paralysis had been contracted, to the moment when I had landed with my regiment on the shores of the Crimea, young and strong, and buoyant with health, hope, and courage. Some French troops had landed at the same time. Among them was a young officer, with whom I formed an acquaintance. He used to talk to me about his wife and his two little children, and his property in "the Orléanais." He had dark flashing eyes, like the girl's next door, and a handsome dreamy face. He was one of Marshal St. Arnaud's aides-de-camp, and fell at the Alma. His name was Henri d'Aubusson. I have his card still, and a little gold pencil-case he gave me the night before the battle. Could he have been any relation to the Alma of this afternoon? Fanny was sure he was, and, for once, Fanny was right.

"I should like to call upon them," she said. "It would only be kind to do so; and it would be so nice for Grace to have a French companion." Little Mrs. Brooke was one of those people who are always on the look-out for ulterior advantages, bargaining, as it were, with the future, by means of the present.

"How, a French companion for Gracie?" ask I, innocently. "Do you mean the little dog?"

"I mean the girl, of course," replies my sister, in the most matter-of-fact tones.

"The girl!" I cry, astonished. "Why, she is a grown-up young lady. Very nice for Gracie, no doubt; but——"

"Well, I am sure she behaves more like a child in some ways than Gracie does," interrupted my sister, rather testily.

So the very next day, the Victoria, and the high-stepping ponies and the jingling bells, were turned round suddenly, and pulled up as abruptly, at the door adjoining ours; and the little rosy-cheeked page (another pretty, but expensive *objet de luxe*) majestically delivered Mr. and Mrs. Brooke's and Captain Herbert Smith's visiting-cards to Mademoiselle Thérèse, who came forth in a tall white cap to receive them. And the day after that, the same white cap brought us back La Comtesse d'Aubusson's cards, black-edged, and very largely printed, as if for the aged, and there for a time our intercourse paused.

It was little Grace, my niece, who brought us together once more. Some one had lent the child a key to the gardens in Eccleston Square, and the little maiden, being of a sociable temperament, insisted upon inviting all her small tribe of friends to play

with her there. August, however, is not a favourable month for child-dissipation in London. Poor John Brooke did not get his holiday till September, and Gracie, seeing her friends depart day after day, began to long for the companionship of the French girl. She was more than double her age; but the child seemed to feel instinctively that there was some sympathy between them. "She is like a queen, and I am her tire-woman," said the learned little maiden, who had just begun to read *Stories from English History*. "Uncle Herbert, was there ever a queen called Barbara?"

"I know her at last," cried the child triumphantly one day. "I saw her walking outside the gardens, and I asked her to come in, and she liked it so much. She began running races at once, and said it was ever so much nicer than her garden at home, where she always had to walk beside her aunt's chair. There were no children for her to play with there. Her brother was at the college, and her mother was always away with the Court at Paris. So it was very dull for Barbara. And then she told me some stories—fairy stories, you know—not stupid ones, like what they put in books, but pretty ones, about fairies who know how to cure sick animals. And Barbara knows, too, how to cure sick animals. She can pull thorns out of the little dog's feet, and she cured her blackbird. Both its legs were broken

when she picked it up, and she has mended one, you see. And oh, just think, Uncle Herbert, she was engaged to be married once, and the man she was engaged to was killed in a battle—I forgot the name of the battle—but her brother was killed there too. And so, you see, she is a sort of widow."

Little Grace had the true spirit of the old romance-tellers within her. She had kept the grand climax to the end. We were all interested. Even poor tired John Brooke looked up from his book to listen to his little daughter. It was rather a shock the next morning, after hearing the history of the black-bird, and so much about the wisdom of the fairies who know how to cure sick animals, to see that poor little creature lying dead in its wicker cage. Mademoiselle d'Aubusson came out on her balcony whilst I was looking at it. She burst into tears when she saw what had happened.

"I think you have rather neglected the poor little bird of late," say I, in a moralising tone. "You gave it no water one day; and once or twice you did not clean its cage. I suppose you forgot all about it."

She looked up at me with shining eyes. She was evidently rather surprised at my homily.

"No, I did not forget," she said. "I did it on purpose."

"You did it on purpose?" I repeated. "That was barbarous indeed. You wanted it to die, then?"

"No, no ; I did not want it to die—I only wanted it to be ill," she answered.

"You wanted it to be ill?" I echoed, more and more surprised.

"Yes," she said, in her pretty broken English—"yes, Monsieur, I wanted it to be a little ill. I wanted so much something to take care of."

A Barbara indeed! A systematic, philosophic Barbara, an experimental saint!—it was too much for me. I retreated after that; nor did I take any notice of Gracie's hints that I should give her friend next door another bird.

"I should be sorry to be her blackbird, little niece," say I. "She does not know how to treat a pet. She would be for making experiments on my arms, as my legs are *hors de combat*."

Grace opened her eyes, and laughed heartily at the idea of my being anybody's pet.

"Perhaps Madame d'Aubusson will give Barbara another bird when she comes back," said the child.

We called her Barbara still. It was a name that suited her well. Her quick, sudden movements, as if blown hither and thither by some unseen, wayward power—her equally sudden droppings into a sort of absorbed indifference to outside things, all reminded me of the picture in Venice, with the dreamy eyes and beautiful swaying figure. Grace had caught the

name too, and thoroughly entered into the spirit of it.

Madame d'Aubusson continued to be a great deal away. She would come back sometimes for a day or two, and look sadly round the little house, and then return to her duties. It was rather a pity, I thought, that she should leave her daughter so much alone; but she had perfect confidence in Thérèse, and she was glad her child had found some English friends. The hearts of those she went to serve were full of aching anxiety, and the shadow of disgrace, ay, and of death, had already fallen across the path of him who had once been heralded from "the Seine to the shore" as "Emperor evermore." How could the gentle countess, who had shared in the bright days of that imperial family, desert it now that clouds had gathered around its path? Poor Madame d'Aubusson's lines had lately fallen in hard places. She was a delicate, frail-looking woman, who ought to have basked in sunshine all the days of her life. The Court to which she belonged had been the gayest in Europe. She had forgotten, perhaps, the husband of her youth, or only thought of him with a little passing sigh of regret. Her boy had grown up beautiful as an angel; her girl was pretty too, people said, who saw her sometimes flitting about like a sunbeam through the old courts and corridors of her aunt's house in the country. And then suddenly a

thunderbolt had fallen. The agony of Sedan had obliterated the tender memories of Alma. Her son, her hero, her god, her beautiful, strong Achille, whom she had thought almost immortal, was dead—dead, lying stiff and stark under the sod, with a wooden cross on his breast. Ah, how do mothers live through such agonies!

“And Paul is dead too,” said the little daughter timidly, clinging to her mother in those first dreadful days.

Paul de Vaubecour was Mademoiselle d’Aubusson’s *fiancée*. She had only seen him twice, but she mourned him most decorously. The marriage had been arranged since she was ten years old. When she was about fifteen, her aunt in the country had died, and the young daughter had come to live with her mother in Paris. It was not very good for her. The air of a Court is not a wholesome thing for a country-bred maiden. M. de Vaubecour was sent for. He expressed his warmest approbation of his little *fiancée*. He gave her his portrait in a locket set round with pearls. They were formally betrothed. They were to be married next year. Then came the war, and next year’s hopes were blown out like a candle in a breath of wind.

M. de Vaubecour had never been heard of since the fatal first of September. He, too, must have fallen on that terrible field of Sedan. True, his name

had never yet appeared among the lists either of the slain or the missing; but then lists were not very accurately kept in those days. If he had been made a prisoner, he would surely have managed to escape somehow. Even if he were shut up in besieged Paris, he could still communicate with his friends by means of carrier pigeons. Other refugees in London had done so. No, he must be dead. It is only the dead who are dumb. So argued his despairing little bride. Another sort of woman might have drawn another conclusion; a mother, for instance, would have hoped against hope, and argued with despair; this girl resigned herself to her fate.

But she was a widow, as she said pathetically—a widow without having been a bride. She cherished the memory of her lost lover. She wore his portrait round her neck, tied with a black ribbon. She showed it to me one day. She was as frank about him as she had been about her blackbird. Paul must have been a handsome man if he resembled his portrait. He must have had a charming smile, a pair of beautiful blue eyes, and a fine glow of health mantling his cheeks. He came from the sunny south, but he looked as fair and strong as any hardy Norseman. I fear I should have envied him had he been still alive. As it was, I admired him greatly, and said so.

“Yes, he was *bien beau*,” answered his little widow,

slipping her *médailion* back into its place. And then, looking me full in the face, she asked abruptly—

“ Why have you never married, Monsieur Smeet ? ”

It was an embarrassing question, the more so as I had no romantic confidences to give her in exchange for her own. She stood quite still, leaning against the window-frame, with her face turned towards me, and her clear, lucid eyes seeking mine enquiringly.

“ Who would marry me ? ” I ask at length, glancing at my useless, shrunken limbs.

“ I would,” she answered quickly, without knowing what she was saying. And then suddenly she became confused, and blushed rosy-red. “ I mean, of course, if I had been alive ever so many hundred years ago. And there must be plenty of people like me in the world, I should think.”

“ I do not know that,” I say, smiling. “ And even if you had been alive all those hundreds of years ago, you would still have been engaged to Paul, I suppose.”

“ Ah, Paul ! ” she said, clutching at her locket again, and passing it across her lips in her pretty, quick way. “ Do you know, Monsieur Smeet, sometimes I forget about Paul altogether, and then I am so sorry. Supposing he should not be dead after all ? Supposing he was badly wounded, but not killed at Sedan ? His arms might have been shot off, you

know, so that he could not write ; or he might have lost the use of them afterwards, as you lost the use of your legs after the battle of the Alma. And supposing he came back to me some day, and said——”

“ Do not let us *suppose* it,” say I, suddenly interrupting her. “ Let us hope that it may be so.”

She looked at me for a moment, as if puzzled at my burst of solemnity, and then suddenly dashed off into a game with Gracie. They had established a new common interest by this time ; and had instituted a small hospital for the reception of diseased plants and maimed animals in one corner of the balcony, and they spent a good deal of their time in tending those objects. It was a pretty sight to see the children bending over a poor little sparrow that had been run over in the street, or tying up the dreary-looking flowers that were drooping from drought and dust. Mademoiselle d’Aubusson was head-physician, of course. Grace was assistant-surgeon, bandage-roller, dresser, what not.

“ It is better than the blackbird experiment,” said I one day, leaning on the iron railing and looking at the girls busy over their work. Barbara blushed suddenly.

“ Oh, don’t remind me of that,” she cried, clasping her hands together. “ It was a cruel thing ; but I know better now. That was nearly a year ago.”

So it was—nearly a year ago. But I could scarcely believe it. Other years had seemed to crawl along : this one had flown. How had such a change been effected ? Was I really growing stronger ? I could walk across the room without the help of a stick now. Gracie declared she had heard Uncle Herbert laugh oftener during the last month than she had done in all her life before. Brooke, my brother-in-law, rallied me on my improved appearance. “ I always knew he would be better if he exerted himself more,” said Fanny, sapiently. Even Madame d’Aubusson congratulated me on my altered looks.

“ There comes a time when such maladies wear themselves out, I believe,” she said, in her sad, thin, low-pitched voice. “ Ah, if only such had been the fate of mon Achille !”

Poor young Achille ! A year ago I should have told his mother that his fate was better than mine ; but now I was not sure. My feelings had undergone a change. I could once more say—

“ This world is very lovely : O my God,
I thank Thee that I live.”

I could not return Madame d’Aubusson’s congratulations with regard to her own health. She seemed to be thinner and paler each time she came back to De Vere Street, and she caught her breath painfully as she went upstairs. She came in one day to thank us again for what she called our great

kindness to her daughter. I noticed her increased delicacy of appearance particularly that day.

“ You know her little history,” she said, speaking of her young daughter, and looking for sympathy from Mrs. Brooke, who would gladly have given her some, only she had none to give. “ The d’Aubussons have always been a family of soldiers, and September is a fatal month to them. First, the Alma—you remember that, Captain Smith?—where the father of my children was killed; then this still more terrible Sedan. My son is shot, my daughter’s fiancée also; we poor women are left unprotected. *Ma propriété est pillée par ces Prussiens.* My château is fired; my fortune is destroyed. It matters little for me; but for my daughter, for my Alma, I can see no refuge but the convent.”

Fanny looked alarmed. The word convent had an awful sound in her ear. She was no rigid Protestant; she attended the fashionable churches of the neighbourhood. But there were, now-a-days, Anglican sisterhoods as well as Catholic convents. Supposing Grace should take it into her head to imitate her friend? What an awful supposition! This intimacy with the young French girl must be stopped. Grace must have a governess; they had long talked about getting her one; they must get one at once now. A convent, indeed! The mere sound of such a word sealed the mother’s lips with terror.

"I hope there may be a better fate in store for Mademoiselle d'Aubusson than that," say I, from my sofa.

Madame d'Aubusson looked round rather surprised.

"We Catholics are not accustomed to think the convent such a very bad fate," she said gently, as she took her leave.

Nevertheless, there was a better fate in store for the young French girl. That very evening a strange thing happened. The postman, who brought me an advertisement concerning "Patent Soda-water Bottles," and Fanny a milliner's bill, slipped a letter into the box of the house next door. It was from M. de Vaubecour. He had not been killed after all. He had not even been wounded. He was taken prisoner at Sedan, and had been sent on with half the army to Stettin. He had only just now effected his exchange. He would be with them soon. He yearned to see his little *fiancée* once more, and his kind, true friend, Madame d'Aubusson. And only a day or two after that, Barbara came leaping out on the balcony, in her trailing white dress, and, leaning over the railing, pushed her bright face in at my window, and sang out—

"Paul is come, Monsieur Smeet! Paul has arrived."



CHAPTER II.

ALMA.

“O Alma, casta e limpida!”

PAUL DE VAUBECOUR was a very nice young man. He wore faultless boots and gloves, and the neatest of ties and collars. He was about twenty-five years of age. He had a handsome person and graceful manner. He always listened attentively when anyone spoke to him. He always smiled benignly in return.

He was exactly like his portrait. He had the same charming smile; his eyes were just as blue, his cheeks just as brown and healthy-looking. And I think the portrait must have been almost as amusing a companion as the original, for M. de Vaubecour seemed to have very little to say for himself.

“Is he always so silent?” I asked Mademoiselle d’Aubusson one day, when Fanny had dragged me into the next house to pay my respects to the young hero. M. de Vaubecour did not speak much English,

nor understand it either. I had previously ascertained that important fact. His *fiancée* made a little *move*.

"It is better to say nothing than to ask silly questions," she replied, rather pettishly. Mine was an impertinent, if not a silly question, I own. And to this day I do not know whether she was angry with me or not.

They made a great fuss about their hero: women always do. They must have had *fricandeau* for dinner every day, judging by the amount of fatted calf Thérèse took into the house. The little *fiancée* fluttered about and filled their room with flowers: stephanotis, cape jessamine, and other rare but heavy-smelling things. I suppose M. de Vaubecour gave them to her. Their scent came floating into our room too. It was very disagreeable, I thought. Madame d'Aubusson hired a carriage, and they all went out driving together. I never saw horses kick up so much dust as theirs did. I was obliged to pull down the blinds when they went out, but the room became so hot I pulled them up again before they came home. I don't know in which direction they took their drives, but they must have been rather dull ones, for they always came back looking tired of each other. Perhaps they went to buy the trousseau.

I was sorry for poor Madame d'Aubusson. It

must have been hard to think of her son lying dead under the field of Sedan, and to see her daughter's lover come back from the same battle unhurt. She felt it keenly. She used to stand still sometimes, and press her hand against her side, and catch her breath in little gasps. And then she would move away calmly and smile at her little daughter, and put a question or two to the returned and conquering hero.

"He has not even a scratch anywhere!" said the hero's betrothed to me one day.

"Well, that is lucky," responded I. "It would have been a pity to disfigure his handsome face."

"But it would have been more glorious," she answered. "It must make one feel so great to suffer for one's country." Then changing the conversation in her abrupt way, she said, "See, here is a tassel I have twisted for your stick. You still use one when you go out walking, do you not?"

I went out walking now, up and down the street, and round and round the gardens of the square. But alas! no Mademoiselle d'Aubusson was to be found there. In fact, we saw but little of her in those days. Sometimes, for a moment or two, on the balcony, before M. Paul had completed his toilette, or Thérèse had served *le déjeuner*, as had been the case when the above conversation took place. But that was all. There were no more games with

Gracie—no more walks, talks, and daily meetings at our house. It could not be otherwise, of course, but the child grumbled greatly about it.

"I am sure I am as amusing as that stupid M. Paul, who never speaks," said she, crossly; "and I don't believe Barbara likes him half so much as she likes you, Uncle Herbert."

"You ought not to say such things, Grace," I said, authoritatively. "It only shows what a baby you are. Mademoiselle d'Aubusson is seventeen, and engaged to be married. You cannot expect her to play with a little girl like you any longer. I hope your governess will teach you better."

"She played with me last week, and she is only one week older now than she was then," returned the child, not a whit abashed, even by the thought of the dreaded governess.

Only one week older, but she seemed miles further away now than she had done then. Was she any happier in that region whither she had flown? At first I think she was, in a strange, bewildered way. She could not make enough of Paul. She talked to him all day long, wearying him with questions, and never waiting for his answers. But, by degrees, she began to find out that he had no answers to give; by degrees she discovered that her god was not made of silver or gold, but of some rather dull and heavy metal, such as lead, perhaps. It was a mournful

discovery, on the part of our mercurial neighbour—poor little Alma !

It was not altogether M. de Vaubecour's fault. Young men and maidens on the other side of the water are so accustomed to have all their love-making done for them, that when they do come together there seems to be nothing left for them to say. Besides, how could a young man of an easy-going disposition, who had merely served in the war because it was impossible *not* to serve in the war, but who was very glad now that it was all over, and he had escaped so easily—and who looked forward to nothing better than a long life spent upon his own uninjured property in Bretagne, far from the strife of men and the turmoil of politics—how could such a man, young, strong, unambitious, untroubled by sentiments, or dreams, or original ideas of any sort, sympathise with the heroics of a girl who thought death for one's country, or one's cause, or one's principles, the noblest thing in life ? How, indeed ? Poor little Alma !

“ Your sentiments are truly grandiose, but they fatigue one in this hot weather,” said M. de Vaubecour to her one day. Our friends from next door had come in, in due form, to return the visit Fanny and I had paid them, and Mademoiselle d'Aubusson had been giving expression to some of the above sentiments. She flashed out upon him scornfully—

“Do they fatigue you? What right have you to be fatigued? If you had lost your ears *à la guerre*, *à la bonne heure*—or even your legs, so that you could not walk in here—” and then she stopped short suddenly, with a crimsoning face. She had forgotten all about me, I suppose.

M. de Vaubecour looked half-huffed, half-amused.

“It seems to me that this conversation is more suited to M. le capitaine than to me,” said M. le lieutenant, with a low bow to his crippled host.

His crippled host bowed in return, and thought the remark in rather bad taste; and M. de Vaubecour’s *fiancée* thought so too, I fancy. She blushed, and remained silent during the rest of the visit. Nor did she ever again refer to any such things as fighting, or dying for one’s country, in any conversation with her gallant lover.

I think the pair were happiest when Madame la Comtesse was with them. I suppose, however, she thought it good for them to be sometimes alone together, and so they were permitted to wander down the street, about the length of a dog’s chain, or to sit out on the balcony, staring at nothing. I caught them there one day, yawning wearily, and I do not think it was the first or only time.

“How hot your London is,” said M. de Vaubecour, with a gasp. “The air in these northern climates is

so very oppressive." It was the only spontaneous remark I ever heard him make.

"And your Stettin—was not the air there equally oppressive? It is also in the north, you know," returned his *fiancée*, with rather a keen look.

"It was not so hot and heavy as it is here," replied M. Paul, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Or, at least, if it were, one could get away under the trees, and drink beer *al fresco*. Here there seems to be nothing to do but to sit on these smoky balconies."

"No—nothing but balconies," returned the girl, with flashing eyes. "But at Stettin you could get away under the trees, and drink beer *al fresco*, whilst you were still a prisoner?" she asked, in a tone of mingled surprise and displeasure.

M. Paul looked confused.

"No—no—not then—of course," he said, hesitatingly. "It was afterwards—when I was settling about—getting away, you know. I had a few days to spare then."

"And what else did you do at Stettin, besides drinking beer, and settling about—getting away?" asked M. de Vaubecour's affianced bride.

"Got away as fast as I could," replied M. Paul, with a lazy laugh at his own wit.

"That is not true," said the girl, suddenly.

M. Paul jumped up as she spoke.

"How can you doubt my word?" he cried. "Alma, what does this mean?"

But Alma did not seem disposed to enlighten him, and so, after a brief interval devoted to kicking some of the paint off the bars of the balcony, the young man sat down once more. There they remained in absolute silence, till Madame d'Aubusson came out with her pale sad face, and laid her thin hand on her daughter's pretty rounded shoulder, and called both her *chers enfants* in to dinner.

That was their last evening together. I saw the young fellow go away at dusk, with his grey paletot on his arm. His face looked rather hard in the cold evening light, I thought. He walked away softly, delicately, in his thin shiny boots, never looking back once, but going straight on down the street to the river, and no Hero came out on the balcony to light her Leander on his way.

The following day I inquired after the absent swain.

"He is gone," replied Hero, briefly.

"Gone!" I repeated, astonished. "Did you send him away?"

"No, no; he went of his own accord. Nevertheless, Mamma is angry with me." And that was all she ever told me concerning her last evening with Paul.

Madame d'Aubusson's anger did not affect her

daughter for very long. She went back to her duties in a day or two, and Mademoiselle d'Aubusson returned to some of her old ways with us; but not to all. She would talk to Grace, rather than play with her—talk in a grave serious manner, which made the child open her eyes wide. She never again came bounding out on the balcony, nor peeped over the railing, nor sang out our names when she wanted us, but was properly announced when she came to call, and sat down in the drawing-room, and talked just like any other grown-up young lady. Little Grace was in despair.

“Barbara is gone,” she would say, “gone away with M. Paul, I suppose—and—and—I don’t know who has come in her place.”

“Alma,” said our Barbara of a month ago, very softly and gently.

Alma, Alma; yes, so it was. The soul was awake at last. She could no more go back to her old state than a grown man could put on a boy’s jacket. Her eyes would fill with tears at a rough word spoken to a child she passed in the street. She screamed one day when Fanny’s Victoria and high-stepping ponies nearly ran over a poor little dog. “He would have been a nice patient, if his leg had been broken,” said Grace, professionally, watching the little black creature scamper away frantically down the street. “He would have been a sort of king in our hospital.”

"No, no," said Alma, quickly. "It is Grace who is Barbara now, is it not, M. Smeet?"

"All *children* are so," I answer, smiling and emphatic.

Her young unfolding womanhood also took the form of intense anxiety about her mother. Does she look ill? I was forced to own I thought she did. Worse than last time? Tell her truly, exactly what I thought. And then, it was the cold, or the damp, or anxiety about the Emperor's health that made everybody ill, and the young daughter would moan over having to part from her delicate mother so constantly.

"Cannot you stay?" she would say, when the time of departure came. "Another week—another day. It would rest you, Mamma."

No, Mamma could not stay; but she would try to manage some time that her daughter should go with her, which will be "*quite autre chose*," said the daughter, with a sigh, as she repeated the words to me.

Quite *autre chose*; I should think so!

When the house next door should be shut up, or, worse still, occupied by some one else. And yet it must come sometime, of course. When the Imperialists should be restored to the throne—when M. de Vaubecour returned—when Madame d'Aubusson was dead. Alas! this possibility seemed to be almost a certainty, and not a very distant one.

“Je souffre beaucoup,” said the poor lady, appealing this time to me, not to Fanny, for sympathy. “I wish M. de Vaubecour would return.”

I could not echo her wish. It would have been better, perhaps, if she *had* appealed to Fanny instead of me.

About a month before the Emperor’s death, one bleak, black December day, Madame d’Aubusson sent for her daughter. They packed up quickly, and went off that same evening. Alma came in for a moment, rather pale and dispirited, to wish us good-bye.

“Will you take care of Barbara for me?” she said, slipping the little dog into Grace’s arms. “It will remind you of me sometimes, perhaps.” And the pale lips quivered into a faint smile.

Grace’s face was flushed, and puckered up with tears.

“I shall not want the dog to remind me of you,” she said.

So the blinds were drawn down at No. 4, De Vere Street, and the pleasant French people who had sojourned there were gathered round the deathbed of the greatest monarch of modern times. But love and devotion were as unavailing as skill and science; and he, who of all Frenchmen was the most necessary to his country, died an exile in England, on the 9th of January, 1873.

In the shock of this event there slipped away, almost unperceived, a faithful adherent of the Napoleonic dynasty. Ten days after the Emperor's death, Madame d'Aubusson died too, quite calmly but suddenly, in the arms of her daughter. "There was not even time to bid me *adieu*," wrote the poor desolate orphan. She only said, "*Je me trouve mal*," and gasped for breath, and then her head fell back upon my shoulder. I thank you for all your sympathy, dear kind friends. I trust I may see you again some day. For the present, however, Her Majesty desires I should remain beside her." And after these few abrupt, heart-broken lines, written in answer to a letter of condolence from Mrs. Brooke, we heard nothing more of Mademoiselle d'Aubusson.

January passed away—February—March. April came dancing in with its wealth of blossoms, its bursts of music, its sunshine and rainbows, and all the glad things which make known that "the winter is past," and the spring has come back once more to the earth.

The 10th of April was Gracie's birthday.

"See, Uncle Herbert," cried the nine-year-old maiden, bounding into the room with the dog at her heels. "See, I have tied a purple ribbon round Barbara's neck. That's for mourning, you know, as well as being the Imperial colour; and here is a bunch of violets for you."

Grace's mother looked up from behind her tea-urn.

"I am sure I hope the governess who is coming will teach you to forget all that silly nonsense about Imperialists, Grace," she said, rather sharply. "They have no chance in France, at present, and the one Imperialist you ever knew seems to have forgotten all about you. I must say, I thought Mademoiselle d'Aubusson would have remembered your birthday."

"Never mind, little daughter," says honest John Brooke, looking up from his pile of letters. "There is a post every hour, you know (bad luck to it), and perhaps Mademoiselle d'Aubusson's present will come later."

And it did—it did—Brooke was right. It came at mid-day—with a sudden opening of the door, and a soft, low laugh outside, and a sharp bark from the dog inside; then a rush from Gracie, and a quick, startled look from a certain Herbert Smith, who was lying on the sofa, pretending to read a French novel (upside down), and Mademoiselle d'Aubusson walked into the room, in her sweeping black robes, tall, graceful, sad-looking, but more beautiful than ever.

"Isn't it your birthday, Grace?" she said, nervously stooping over the child. "Look, I have brought you a present." And she fastened something round the child's throat.

Grace shouted with delight. Her present was a gold *médailion*, set with pearls, and exactly like the

one in which Mademoiselle d'Aubusson used to wear M. de Vaubecour's portrait. This one contained, of course, a portrait of Alma. I glanced from the gift to the giver. There seemed to be no corresponding ornament round Mademoiselle d'Aubusson's own throat now.

“*On ne porte pas ces choses là, quand on est en déuil,*” she said carelessly in French, as if in answer to my look. And then, turning once more to Gracie, she went on talking calmly.

“ You will think of me sometimes when you wear that locket, won't you, dear? You may never see me again, you know. But I shall not forget—any of you—and you will not quite forget me, will you, Gracie? ”

“ Never see you again! ” exclaimed Gracie, too much frightened even to cry. “ Why, what are you going to do? ”

“ I am going to enter a convent, ” replied Alma, in a low voice. “ I have come back for a few days, just to pack up my things next door— ”

“ And shall you like entering a convent? ” inquired Gracie, whose knowledge of such matters was (notwithstanding her mother's fears) but limited as yet. ”

“ I do not know—it does not matter—there's nothing else for me to do. ”

A sudden thought darted into little Gracie's mind. “ Nothing else to do? ” she repeated, standing upon

tiptoe, as if weighing her thought well before putting it into words. "Oh, Alma, if you have nothing else to do—why don't you stay here—and be my—governess!"

"And when I said that," continued the child, repeating the story to the father and mother afterwards, "Uncle Herbert jumped up off the sofa, and looked just as if he was going to dance."

Alma d'Aubusson was not very long my niece's governess. Any one wandering through the south of France last summer might have seen her wandering there too, by the side of a man, grey-haired indeed, and rather lame, but not otherwise particularly old or decrepit. Vichy is not very far from Clermont Ferrand, and Clermont Ferrand is close to Aubusson. The château of the family is farther away to the south of Montargis. It was rendered uninhabitable by the Prussians. It may be restored some day, when the peasant's homes have been rebuilt, and their rents begin to flow in easily once more. Meanwhile, an old farmhouse at the head of the village, and the foot of the great avenue, makes a comfortable home for a happy pair.

"I always knew it would be so," says little Mrs. Brooke, with that back-handed sapience for which she is famous. "I knew it from the day when I

turned the ponies' heads round suddenly, and drew them up before the door of the next house. I told John so. Only John is so stupid, he never remembers these things." And I believe in her heart of hearts little Mrs. Brooke was even then speculating whether she ought not to make over one of the said ponies to her new sister-in-law.

We have no need of it. There is a long-tailed pony for Gracie to ride whenever she comes to stay with us, which is very often; for Aunt Alma seems to be almost fonder of the child than even the girl Barbara had been.

"She made us so happy once," says my wife, apologetically.

"Yes, I believe the monkey had actually the audacity to propose for me," return I, with a laugh.

And M. Paul? "I have never seen him since that night on the balcony," said Mademoiselle d'Aubusson to me, whilst still a governess. "I did not exactly give him his *démission* then, but he took it somehow. He left me alone for a time; then he wrote to me. It was after the death of Sa Majesté—after the death of my mother—that he wrote. It was a generous letter. He said he feared he had disappointed me, that he was not all I had expected. He implored me to speak the truth. I did speak the truth. He was satisfied—"

"And what?" I ask, seeing that she hesitated, "what was the truth?"

"The truth was, that I had learnt—to—like someone else—before I knew him," she answered, hanging her head and looking very shy.

"The d——l you did!" cry I, in a fury. "And who was that, pray?" She hung her head down—lower, and lower still.

"You," she whispered softly.

I caught her face between my hands. I lifted it up to mine, all sweet and blushing.

"My dear child," say I, paternally, calmed at once; "how can that be, when you came over from France engaged to M. de Vaubecour?"

"I do not know," she answered, simply. "I had seen him twice before, it is true, and I *thought* I liked him; but I *knew* I—liked you from the first moment I saw you. Besides—"

"What!—another besides?"

"There was a young German *mädchen*," she said, twisting her hands nervously together, and trying to pull away her face, which was still a prisoner. "She was the daughter of the military commandant at Stettin. She helped him to get away, he said, but I think, in reality, she must have kept him there. He was in a measure pledged to her. He is gone back to her now, and is, I hope, quite happy with her—drinking beer *al fresco*."

“I am sure he is,” say I, happy myself, and yet indignant that anyone should slight my Alma for all the German commandants’ daughters in the world. “If he can say *ja* and *so*, it will suffice. The Germans are never great at conversation. But you—my beautiful singing-bird—how will you ever be happy with me, after having known such a brilliant being?”

She turned her sweet face full upon me once more.

“I always wanted another blackbird to take care of, you know,” she said; “and now, at last, I have got one.”

“A blackbird with a vengeance!” cry I. “A blackbird with grey feathers and two broken legs instead of one.”

And, as I speak, the moon rises suddenly over the tops of the chimneys of the opposite houses, and floods the earth and sky alike with one great wave of silver light. We clasp each other’s hands silently. We do not speak, but we know that as there is light in heaven so there is love in our hearts. And as the moon shines brighter and more golden—as night’s darkness deepens, so may our love, too, grow stronger as life itself drops away from us day by day.



F'RONA!

ME had come down from the mountains. Only yesterday we had been up there, with our heads in the sky—so it seemed to us to-day, looking back on those heights—and we had seen the sun go down in solemn splendour, and the snow-tops flare up with sudden fires, peak behind peak, slowly revealing themselves like virgin daughters of a dying monarch gathering round his bedside; and then, by degrees, the sky had grown sharp, and clean, and cold, and blue as a glacier, and the old stars had come out, and a vain young moon as well, and gazed at themselves in the depths of the dark-green lake, and we had buttoned up our coats as we paced the terrace, and by-and-by had gone in and feasted off chamois cutlets and Valtellina, after which we had betaken ourselves to the *salon* and talked

We were a pleasant party about to break up, and there is always something rather melancholy about that. We talked of it, however, as English people generally do talk of such things, without the least trace of sentiment, laughing over past adventures, and making plans for future meetings.

“We must do the Sella Pass next year,” said one of the ladies. Ladies usually are foremost in these proposals. “Mr. W——, at Pontresina, has been telling me all about it. You must sleep at the Roseg Inn, and start at two in the morning. It only takes fifteen hours if the snow is in good condition, and you have the most magnificent views in the world. Oh—and there is the Piz Campaccio—I can’t bear going away and leaving that undone, Gus.”

“Well, we did try that last year, you know,” said Gus, soothingly. “But that tiresome snow-storm caught us up, just as we got to the Bernina Pass. We had some fun out of it, though, all the same. Don’t you remember the snow-balls? and how we pelted a travelling carriage that happened to be passing at the time . . .” And here Gus, who, I am almost ashamed to say, was a head-master (I will not name the school), rubbed his hands together in glee at the remembrance of the exploit.

“It was some Italian nobleman’s carriage,” said Gus’s sister. “He had just married a young girl

from one of these villages, and was taking her back to Italy with him. I remember her face—such a pretty, bright face; she put it up to one of the windows and laughed at the snow-balls” And Miss Browne went on talking in a pleasant, picturesque way which she had; but we none of us listened very much, I am afraid. We were tired, or dull, or sorry to part, or glad to part, and presently we all shook hands with each other, and before the next day’s sun was fully awake, we were most of us scattered far and wide over the face of the mountains, like the handful of seeds the Venetian girl throws down to the pigeons in the Piazza San Marco.

The Brownes and I were not going to part quite at once. We were old friends, and had agreed to pursue our journey a little farther together. My acquaintance with the Doctor, indeed, dated from a very early period, while he was only as yet undermaster at a private school, and I just budding into all the glory of short jackets and tall hats. My acquaintance with his sister, who was considerably younger than “Gus”—in fact, about the same age as I was myself—commenced at the same time. Our friendship had always been based on the broadest principles of enmity. At that early age she used to reproach me with a vulgar taste for “sucks,” a propensity to dirty hands and rough hair, and a low-bred preference for marbles over dolls. Now her

taunts were chiefly levelled at my low radical principles, my democratic tastes—why didn't I marry a washerwoman's daughter, and make a shining example of myself?—my want of enthusiastic admiration for the places she raved about—for Switzerland in general, for the Engadine in particular.

“But I do admire it hugely,” I interposed meekly. “Only there is rather too much of it. Endless snow-peaks and pine forests, and metallic blue skies, clear as crystal and equally cold, are all very well in their way; but I own to liking something less bleak to look at, something certainly more genial to feel, ‘whene'er I take my walks abroad’——”

“Yes, that is it,” she retorted. “It is all too grand for you. You had better spend your next summer holidays at Margate.”

If it had been somewhat cold the night before on the terrace at St. Moritz, we could hardly breathe the following morning at Chiavenna. A hot, dense, vapoury mist hung between us and the sky, through which the mountains loomed vaguely, grey, and spectral. All yesterday we had come clambering down their sides, now in sharp abrupt bends and curves, now in long stretches of uphill and downhill road. We had turned our backs on the great ice-sheets (those strange white pages on which the

Almighty writes so many mysterious lessons !)—and had gone clattering through silent forests, and over dashing torrents, and past funny little brown-and-white toy villages, perched like wild-birds' nests in the clefts of the rocks, till by-and-by a dazzling vision had unfolded itself before our eyes, olives began to crystallise the slopes, vineyards garlanded the valleys, the hills themselves flushed and paled, then flushed again with strange, soft, melting, opalescent tints; the very rocks seemed to burst forth into leaf and flowers, and so, step by step, we rolled down into sunshine, warmth, beauty, colour, fragrance, harmony—Italy, in one word.

At Como a final separation of our forces took place. The head-master's holidays were nearly over. He must be setting his face homewards. He was as melancholy and low-spirited about it as any one of his boys could possibly be.

“ You are a lucky young fellow, Myles,” said he to me enviously. “ You have no horde of young barbarians to beckon you back with inky fingers. You can wander at will through this sweet classic land of Homer and Cicero.”

“ Well, I think I had better see as much as I can of the country this year, since I am doomed to spend all my future summers at Margate,” say I with a laugh.

“ Only you will never find that washerwoman's

daughter in Italy. The race does not exist!" cries Miss Browne, with a sorry glance at her own limp, crumpled draperies.

"Not really?" I ask incredulously. And then the steamer on which I stood began to plunge and snort like a great sea monster, as it was, and the head-master shouted out something about Baveno and Stresa, and dinner, and I went across the rippling, dimpling, dancing lake to Menaggio. I slept there that night, and the next day walked through the chestnut wood to Porlezza, where I again took ship, and crossed over to Lugano, from whence I wandered through more vineyards and cornfields and chestnut woods, till I found myself the following day at Luino.

There is a nice little inn at Luino, kept by two brothers, who were formerly waiters at one of the large Milan hotels. They are pleasant little men, exactly alike, except that one has large melancholy brown eyes, and the other small twinkling black ones. They wait, cook, clean, and do everything in the hotel themselves. One of them cooked my lunch, and very well cooked it was; the other served me with it. They both came in at the finish to receive my compliments.

"Have you had a good season?" I asked.

They shook their heads. It was their first year, indeed, and they had not expected much; but the

result, unfortunately, had fallen far short of their very moderate expectations. Last night, however, they had had a stroke of luck. An invalid gentleman had occupied the whole of the first floor—

“But he leaves to-day,” said the melancholy brother, with a sigh.

“Well, he is travelling for the benefit of his health; we could not expect him to stay here for ever,” replied the other.

“What is the matter with him?” I asked, more for the sake of prolonging my conversation with the two little men than for any vivid interest I felt in the invalid gentleman.

“His malady is old age,” said the black-eyed brother.

“And that is a malady that can never be cured,” supplemented the melancholy one. And then, in a still more melancholy voice, he added that the *vapore* had just left Maccagno, and it was time to go down to the landing-place.

We started off down the hot, white, sun-bleached road. The two little men accompanied me. They were in hopes of fresh arrivals. The invalid gentleman drove down in his carriage. It passed us just as we reached the fruit-booth in the square.

The invalid gentleman! Surely that was no invalid's face, nor a gentleman's face either, that peered out of the window as the carriage passed us.

No, it was a little, round, rosy face, with eyes as blue as the sky, and such a sweet, innocent, half-opened, wondering mouth. I saw it all in a turn of the wheel.

“I thought you spoke of a gentleman,” say I to my two little men. But at that moment the steamer scraped against the sides of the little wooden pier, and a splashing and dashing of waves ensued; a plank was flung across between the boat and the shore, and the passengers came off and the passengers went on, in the midst of which general commotion my two little men disappeared in their characters of touters for their new hotel.

“I think we may go now,” said a pretty, clear, rippling voice, in soft, slow Italian; and a little childish figure jumped out of the carriage.

An old man followed—a very old man—feeble and tottering. His coat hung in folds round his poor shrunken form; his head was bent, his face as grey as the ashes of a fire that is burnt out. He looked absolutely stepping head-foremost into the grave.

The girl helped him carefully out of the carriage, and then, slipping her arm in his, led him down to the little plank. I, following their steps, could not help watching the pair. There was something so touching, so tender, in the way in which he clung to her, and she supported him.

At the plank all was bustle and confusion still ; people were coming and going, and boxes were being carried across. The old man placed his trembling foot on this end of the plank just when a burly German at the other gave it an unconscious shove. The board slipped suddenly, the girl's hand was jerked out of the old man's, and in another second he would have been precipitated into the water, but for an intervening arm which was fortunately able to steady him, and drag him back to shore.

That intervening arm was mine, and I shall never forget the look of gratitude on the old man's face, nor the pretty words that came rippling from the young girl's lips like a little bubbling stream in spring-time.

We all went safely on board together a moment later, that little incident having made us friends on the spot.

The girl became very busy immediately, darting about hither and thither in search of cushions and stools, and looking out for a comfortable seat for the old man, who was her father probably, though he might with equal probability have been her grandfather, as far as age went. She found one at last in a cosy corner, shaded from the sun, and sheltered from the wind. She sat down beside him herself, and peered out under the awning with her great, misty, blue eyes.

There was no room for me, and I flattered myself the little girl looked rather sorry in consequence. It could not be helped, however. The boat was full. I strolled away to the other end.

What a lovely scene burst, or rather stole, upon my gaze as I got away clear of the awning. That is one of the peculiar fascinations of Italian beauty. It does not startle you, overcome you all at once by its majesty and awe, as northern scenes do, but rather steals upon you slowly, spreading itself out before you, drop by drop, till it gradually overflows your soul. One's eyes, indeed, take some time to get accustomed to all this strange, soft, many-coloured atmosphere. It is like looking at the world through a rainbow. To-day, for instance: at first I could discern nothing but a golden mist, then a purple one, then a grey one, a blue one, a pink one, as one by one lake and mountain revealed themselves, distance beyond distance, range after range, all dressed up in shadows, with little villages at the foot of the hills, glittering in the westering sun like jewels on a maiden's breast. Overhead the sky grew very clear and bright, and the big white clouds packed themselves away somewhere, and a few tiny pink cloudlets, like scattered, crumpled rose-leaves, came drifting across the sun's pathway. Here and there a little boat went skimming across the lake, staring its glassy surface, and leaving behind it a

track like a comet's tail. In the dim, delicious distance, the new Jerusalem itself, with its jasper walls and pearly gates, seemed to be dilating, drifting asunder, dividing itself into little glistening gemlike islands. And then, slowly and regretfully, the sun sank, and the mountains drew veils over their heads, and the lake's face was stained with great, streaming, crimson tears. For though, in other parts of the world, the sun and the earth may aptly be likened to an old couple well used to each other's absences, in Italy they are still but a pair of sweethearts, to whom this nightly parting gives nightly pain.

And so I drank my fill of all this delicious beauty, and then began to wish for some one to whom to "pass the cup." If only Miss Browne had been present. My fellow-passengers were of the ordinary type—commonplace English and noisy Germans in superabundance. I found myself thinking of the two Italians at the other end of the boat, and by-and-by I threw away my cigar end, and strolled back towards them.

The old man was asleep with his chin on his chest. The girl was awake, very wide awake, with a book across her lap.

"Do you read English?" I asked, with some surprise, going up to her, and seeing that the book in question was a Tauchnitz copy of Miss Thackeray's "Village on the Cliff." It is not often that an Italian

girl, even of the highest class, such as I somehow judged this one to be, becomes proficient in a language which priests, and still more convent authorities, regard as somehow tainted with heresy.

"I can read it a little, signore," she answered, modestly. "*He* likes me to learn it, you see" (indicating with a peculiar, lingering, sing-song accent, the sleeping man by her side). "He is so clever himself, and he thinks I have a little talent for languages. So all last winter, in Venice, I studied English. It is a beautiful language, and this is a beautiful book. The signore Inglese has read it, of course?"

I shook my head. The "signore Inglese" had read it, of course, and admired it greatly; but then —she looked so pretty when she talked.

"Tell me about it," said I.

"It is about a girl who marries a man she does not care for much at first, but whom in the end she learns to love quite passionately. And yet, at one time, she thought she loved some one else, you know. But one can always learn to love what is good, and noble, and true, can one not? That is as sure as the hills." And she lifted up her clear blue eyes, and looked at those solemn darkening heights with a long, lingering, wistful gaze.

"Do you come from the hills?" I asked, watching her. I was puzzled as to her nationality. Altogether

Italian she could not be. She spoke the language prettily enough, but somewhat hesitatingly; and besides, her thoughts seemed to outrun her words, and the Italian ladies I had met hitherto had mostly erred in the opposite direction. German she might possibly have been, but then the old man evidently had not understood a single word of all that torrent of apologies poured upon him by the offending Teuton at the plank. No, he was unmistakably an Italian. His speech, his manner, his narrow, thin, high-featured face, the sudden way in which his dim, dark eyes would light up now and then, like stars flashing out through a mist, all betrayed him. But he might have married a foreigner—an Austrian, perhaps, since he came from Venice. And it would be from her mother that the girl had inherited those lucid blue eyes, and that sweet, slow, hesitating speech of hers.

And so, when I said, "Do you come from the hills?" I intended to make a discovery. But all the answer I got was a quick, startled, searching glance, and a low, half-unwilling murmur.

"We have come—from Venice—last."

"But you are fond of the hills?" I urge.

"Fond of them! Ah!" she said, with a little gasp. "You see, down here in the plains, it is all very beautiful—so warm and sunshiny; and the country is so rich, the things grow of themselves

without any trouble; and the people live well, because there is plenty of corn, and oil, and wine. But up there, among the mountains, it is always bleak and cold, and the winter lasts nine months of the year, and the birds die in the snow, and the people starve sometimes. And yet, somehow, it seems to me better to be up there, among the poor, hard-working people, who are so brave and hardy, than down here, among folks who do nothing but enjoy life, just because they cannot help enjoying life. One seems to breathe purer air up there; one feels at least so much nearer heaven."

I looked at her astonished. These were most daring democratic sentiments to be delivered by such a pretty little aristocrat! What would Miss Browne have said?

"You have a strong feeling for 'the people,'" I remark; "so have I. But I do not agree with you about the mountains. I have just come down from living at the top of some of them, and I did not feel half so near heaven then as I do now." It was the stupidest kind of compliment to pay, but it glanced off her as harmlessly as a poisoned arrow off a magic shield.

"It is just as one—knows," she replied, quietly. And then she looked up at the dark mountains again; and somehow, as she looked, it seemed to me that the light faded out of her eyes, and the glow

from her cheeks, and that her lips parted with a little sigh. Only, why should she sigh as she looked at the hills?

"F'rona!" said an old quavering voice, rather sleepily. "What are you doing, *carina*? star-gazing as usual?" The voice was not unkind, only it sounded rather harsh and jarring at that moment. And, indeed, how should an old man like that ever be able to enter into the feelings of so young a girl, even though she happened to be his own daughter?

"It is too dark to read," said F'rona, meekly. "Besides, we are getting very near Baveno now."

And at Baveno they landed. So did I. I had forgotten altogether the connection between Stresa and dinner, and I am not sure that it would have made much difference even if I had remembered.

All that night I seemed to be dreaming of F'rona. The name was an odd one, but I liked it somehow. There was something quaint and unusual about it, like its owner. I dreamt of her on the mountain-tops, with the light of the sky in her eyes, and the breeze lifting her hair, and blowing it all about her sweet, sunny, rosy face. I dreamt of her in the midst of a gay world, all decked out in jewels and gold, and beautiful, trailing, mist-like dresses, but with the same innocent, bewildered, earnest gaze in her great blue eyes. And then I flew with her back

to the mountains—that was the right background for her, after all—and pictured her trotting in and out of the quaint little Romansch houses, with their balconies and small round windows and big wooden doors, and talking to the peasants, and relieving their wants, and wondering over their brave hardy ways. Ah, no, not wondering; she must understand them, I think. She had known them, she said. That was the strangest part of all.

I did not see her at all the next day. They told us in the hotel that an invalid gentleman had arrived the night before, and begged us to make as little noise as possible in the passages. The invalid's name was Marchese San Giorgio. He came from Venice, and was a great man in his own country. My perspicacity was not at fault, you see.

Baveno is famous for its chestnut woods. They rise all around it, thick and shady, hiding away among the shadows the pretty little *paese* that lie nestling on the hills. There are innumerable paths winding through the woods, funny little paved, stony ways, bounded by low grey walls. All day long, people go up and down them on their bare brown feet, men, women, and children, with long deep baskets on their backs, stuffed full of chestnuts, or apples, or grapes. They move very slowly in a peculiar, swaying, swinging motion of their own, and they rest their baskets on the walls as you pass,

and stare at you with great melancholy dark eyes. They have the greatest respect for "the stranger English," but they marvel at his power of locomotion. "Did the signore walk all the way from England here?" they asked, wondering. Nothing short of an earthquake or a thunderstorm seems to rouse them to anything like activity or anxiety.

There was such a storm one day—one night, I should say, rather. All through the dark hours I had heard it raging round and round the hotel, now shaking the *persiennes*, now tapping at the windows as if to be let in, now bursting into torrents of rain, or flashing out sudden tongues of fire, and finally growling away in the distance, like an angry, disappointed beast of prey. When the morning came, however, all traces of the storm seemed to have disappeared. The sky was as clear as though there had never been a cloud across it; the lake laughed and dimpled like a little child at play. The little town indeed looked rather damp, and there was a perfect harvest of chestnuts under all the trees. One stumbled upon them at every step. They rolled away in all directions. "The ways and the woods smelt sweet," as I went up through them to Romanico, a little village behind Baveno. It was a deserted village for once. No chattering or chaffering from house to house; no children playing on the door-steps; it all seemed silent as a tomb. A donkey

stood in the principal street. His nose was stuffed into one door, his tail into another, the opposite one. It was a tight fit, but he seemed to enjoy it; and ejection was apparently impossible. I was just meditating a flying leap, when an old woman's head appeared over the donkey's tail. She unceremoniously dragged the obtuse quadruped backwards into her kitchen.

"It is my daughter's *asino*," she explained. "She has gone to gather chestnuts. They have all gone except me. I shall go no more, *menga, menga*."

At the end of the village a pretty jumble of sights met my eyes. A pump, a shrine with the picture of a red saint in it; a house all balconies and outside stairs, and with strings of golden maize hanging round it; a road slanting down to the cemetery; a brook trickling away in various directions; a dazzle of sunshine zigzagging through the wet, interlacing leaves; and, under the trees, a group of villagers in their many-coloured petticoats and broad-brimmed hats, raking up the chestnuts that had fallen during the night. They talked together very fast in their quaint, clipped Italian *patois*; but they worked very slowly in a languid, spiritless sort of way, as if such unwonted exertions wearied them greatly. One figure amongst them, however, seemed to be working with a will. I could see it darting hither and thither in a quick, eager way—a little, childish

figure in some dark kind of dress, and a quantity of soft, fair hair, knotted up behind. Suddenly the knot of hair turned round, and I saw instead the sweet, flushed, flower-like face of the old Marchese's F'rona.

She threw down her rake when she saw me. A chorus of voices rose round her.

"Oh, do not go yet, *bell' signuola*—not just yet. You teach us how to work. You work yourself like all the angels. You see, *signore*" (this was addressed to me, confidentially, by an old fellow in shirt sleeves and a velveteen waistcoat), "the *bell' signuola* comes from a country where chestnuts are as scarce as gold; so she knows how to value them."

He was evidently chuckling to himself over the superiority of Lombardy to Venetia.

But the *bell' signuola* left her rake lying on the grass.

"I must go now, my friends," she said in her pretty, slow, hesitating Italian. "And I may never be able to come again. But you will remember, will you not? what I have told you about the poor people who live on the mountains, and who would be glad very often for a handful of those very chestnuts which you leave rotting on the ground."

And then she walked away by my side, just as if I had been sent out to fetch her home.

"I could not help doing that for once," she said

half apologetically to me. "But I may not be able to go again. *He* might not like it, you know."

Like it—the Marchese—no; I should think not. No man, however affable, would like to see his daughter working away among the peasants, getting her feet wet through, and her hands tanned by the sun. And the Marchese San Giorgio was not an affable man, I judged. But I said nothing.

She caught my glance at her feet, however.

"Yes, they are wet," she said, carelessly. "It is very uncomfortable when one wears boots. Otherwise, it does not matter."

"You ought to have been born a peasant," said I. Really this was going too far, even for me.

She looked up at me with a smile, but what a smile—frank, shy, confiding, questioning, artless, guileless, bashful, beautiful all at once. I lived on that smile for days.

I think it was about a week after this adventure that I received a little note from my young lady. It was a funny little note, stiffly written, and very stiffly expressed. It was merely to the effect that the Marchese desired the honour of a visit from me at a stated time on the following afternoon. It was signed Veronica San Giorgio. I was a little surprised, but promised attendance, of course.

An hour or two before the eventful interview I

strolled out into the hotel garden. Veronica San Giorgio was there. I had seen her from my bedroom window. She was sitting on the low wall that divides the garden from the lake. She was, I think, gazing at the hills as usual. She had a bunch of blue flowers on her lap.

She started up when she heard my step on the gravel, and came to meet me with her eager smile. Then something (was it something in my face, or her own heart?) suddenly checked her: she blushed a little, and began listlessly pulling the flowers to pieces.

“Don’t destroy your namesakes,” said I, catching some of the blue fragments between my hands; “it seems cannibal-like. Do you know, I was wondering what your real name could be? F’rona is a pretty pet name, but Veronica is far prettier, I think.”

“Do you think so?” she said, indifferently. “*He* does not like it.”

“Why did he give it you, then?” I asked, feeling nettled, I know not why.

She turned upon me that shy, questioning smile again.

“*He* did not give it me,” she said, slowly, “though he was my godfather. It seems so strange now to think of him as——”

“As your own father,” said I, hastily supplying the blank. Parents do sometimes act as sponsors to their children, I believe.

"As my *husband*," she said, softly and musingly, and letting the words die away in a sigh.

Her husband—that old man; that feeble, tottering, old grandfather? It seemed too horrible to be true. I could not utter a word, but I fear my face expressed my feelings.

"Yes—my husband," she repeated, softly. "Did you not know? Are you very much surprised? Shall I tell you how it happened? You see, we lived on the mountains, and my father was a chamois-hunter, and once saved the Marchese's life in the snow. After that the Marchese never forgot us, but came back, year after year, generally living in our house, because there were not many hotels in the Engadine then. But one year, when he came (it was only a year ago), my father could not go out with him because he was ill, and things had gone badly with us, and we were very poor, because there were so many little ones at home now to be fed, and Cousin Bertol besides; and my father said, 'The Signor Marchese would do well to go to the Kulm Hotel. He will fare better there than here.' But the Signor Marchese would not go to the Kulm Hotel; he would stay with us. He had something to say to my father. And this was what he said to my father. He had seen me grow up, and he wanted to marry me; and he promised to provide for the little brothers, and give portions to the little sisters,

if only I would do so. But I must marry him with a clean heart—that is, declare honestly that I had never cared for anyone else. So I made the declaration easily enough, for I was only fifteen then, and who else could I have seen to care for in that way ? And then my father thanked me, and said I had made it easy for him to die ; and the little brothers and sisters danced for joy, and everybody seemed pleased, except Cousin Bertol. But the Marchese kept his word, and gave him a piece of land for a farm, and sent all the little ones to good schools. And he was very kind to me, and carried me away to a beautiful palace by the sea, and gave me pretty dresses to wear, and jewels and lace, and everything I fancied. But, do you know, I was very wicked and ungrateful, and after a while I grew tired of all these beautiful things, and even of the Marchese's kindness too, sometimes ; and I longed—oh ! how I longed for a sight of a mountain storm, or a cross look from Cousin Bertol. And then the Marchese's relations did not like me, and called me a stupid little *contadina*, and so he took me travelling, and said I had better not tell anybody exactly who I had been. But—but I could not help telling you, because——” And here she stopped short suddenly —stifled, as it were, by a burning blush. . . .

“ Because—what ?” I ask almost fiercely. I had listened to every word she said, and it seemed hard

to be baulked of two or three more, and those, perhaps, the most important of all.

But she flew past me "like a flash of light." She ran along the garden-path into the hotel. A little line of blue veronica petals marked her track. I saw no more.

After all, my interview with the Marchese never came off. I went to Stresa that same afternoon. But, strange to say, though I returned to England almost immediately afterwards, I was never able to give Dr. Browne any lucid information concerning the dinner at the famous Iles Borromées.

One day in the following spring, as I went into my club, a little packet was put into my hands. How it ever reached me was a marvel. It was addressed to the "Illustrissimo Signore Myles, Hôtel des Iles Borromées, Stresa;" but this original direction had been crossed over by a variety of others. The seal had never been broken, however, till I broke it, and found within the packet a biggish box and a little letter. I opened the latter first. It was written in the stiff, childish hand I had seen once before, and was dated St. Moritz, Christmas Day, 187—.

"Illmo. Signore,—I send you, in my husband's name, a small packet, containing a token of his regard for the service you rendered him that day at

Luino. He had hoped to have placed it in your hands himself, and for that purpose solicited the honour of a visit from you at Baveno. But you left before the hour of the visit, and we wondered much over your sudden absence. He is dead now, the good Marchese; and I think I scarcely knew how good he was till he was gone from me. He left me much money; but I only kept enough to take me home to my mother, and have given the rest back to his family. What does one want with money when one lives on the mountains; and if one has been born amongst them, one cannot live anywhere else—at least not well. That is what Cousin Bertòl says. His farm has prospered. He wants me to go and live there with him some day. But I shall weary the signore Inglese with my affairs, and I only wanted to thank him for his kindness to me. For, from first to last, as the good signore will doubtless remember, I could not help talking to him about myself; because—because—I trust he will not be offended—he always reminded me so much of Cousin Bertòl."

The letter was simply signed "F'rona," the grand old Venetian name not being added to it.

The box contained two little miniatures of the Marchese and his young wife. The portraits were very good: they were nicely painted, and set into

cases adorned with coronets, and joined together with a knot of blue veronica flowers. They are the prettiest ornament in my bachelor rooms, and a frequent source of wonderment and speculation to my friends.

“You did not think I had such aristocratic acquaintance?” say I, laughing, to Miss Browne one day, when she and some other lady friends had honoured my rooms with their company at a tea-party.

Miss Browne looked at the miniatures long and earnestly.

“I remember the face now!” she said. “It is the face that looked out of the travelling-carriage and laughed at our snowballs on the Bernina Pass. And I remember the story too. The girl was the daughter of some people at St. Moritz, who had once been in tolerable circumstances, but had become very poor. And then the Marquis appeared, and carried her off. It was quite like a fairy story; but I wonder if she was happy, poor little thing! I remember her mother used to talk about ‘my daughter, the marchioness,’ but I never could learn much from her. She did part of the washing at the Kulm, you know. Why, Mr. Myles,” with sudden animation, “there’s a chance for you—a washerwoman’s daughter and a marquis’s widow, the rarest, most perfect combination. Why don’t you think

about it? That face would create a sensation at Margate, I am sure."

It was a home-thrust, was it not? But, as it happened, I was thinking of something else just then.

After all, too, I did not go to Margate the following summer, but back to the Engadine, and Miss Browne went with me. Only not as Miss Browne any longer, but as Mrs. Myles.

We had both of us mutually agreed to forget all about the washerwoman's daughter.

As we drove up through the winding pine woods to St. Moritz, a sound of bridal bells struck upon our ears.

"It's an appropriate greeting," said I, sentimentally.

"It is a wedding," said Pankraz, our driver, looking back sulkily from his box seat. "The prettiest girl in all the country-side has married the ugliest man in the world to-day."

This was not flattering, if names were what I suddenly suspected they were, and there was any reality in the resemblance alluded to by the Marchesa in her letter.

"Is the lady's name F'rona, and the man's Bertòl?" I asked.

Pankraz nodded.

"Ay, and such a one as Bertòl to pretend to the

hand of our F'rona, who had been married once before to a marquis, you know. But, you see, a grand life soon wearied her, not being born to it, as she said, and so she took up with this ugly Bertòl. Not but what there might have been others——" And here the man suddenly twisted himself round on his seat, and began whipping his horses somewhat viciously.

From which I infer that one or two others besides ugly Cousin Bertòl might possibly have liked to possess themselves of the hand of pretty little Marchesa F'rona.





'NUELA:
A BASQUE CHRISTMAS STORY.

—♦—
P A R T I.

Christmastide is drawing nigh,
Heap the fire, and bake the pie,
Stir the pudding, draw the ale,
Let each guest relate his tale ;
For be they grave,—or be they gay,—
They welcome are on Christmas Day !



HARLES JEKYLL was sore perplexed. He could not make up his own mind, and it was clear no one else could make it up for him.

Such a thing had never happened to him before.

It was a tangle of circumstances, certainly ; and tossing them about in his mind did not seem to unravel them much—rather, indeed, it only served to entangle them the more.

Perhaps the open air would help him. Perhaps the fresh sea-winds would blow away these cobwebs. There was a gravel path in front of his cousin's house. He began to pace up and down it. The wintry sky was clear overhead. Yonder stood the purple Pyrenees. The Bidassoa rolled greyly at their feet. Nearer at hand were the brown heights of Hendaye. His cousin's house, this queer *Maison Manuel*, was built on one of its slopes. He half wished he had never set eyes upon it. Then his heart gave a great thump, and knocked down the wish, and the wild beasts of doubt and perplexity were racing through him once more.

The wind fretted and freshened. It brought on its wings gusts of chapel bells and bursts of convent voices, ringing—singing "*Noël—Navidad—Navidad—Noël*." But with it, alas! came, too, a dull booming firing, a faint echo of bugles, a sound "as of battle afar;" for though it was Christmas Eve, it was not all peace and goodwill in this Basque country three winters ago.

Neither was there peace in Charles Jekyl's heart. Indeed, I think he would sooner have faced a whole regiment of Carlists than this host of armed doubts that seemed to be rising around him on every side. There stood the *Maison Manuel*. He stamped his foot as he turned and faced it. Its grey front was still and calm—its green, sheltered windows looked

fair and peaceful. And yet behind those windows he knew a whole host of perplexities were lying in wait for him. It was like the tuning-up of the fiddles before the opera begins. It was like an overture played backwards, the overture to—let us say—the "*Elisire d'Amore*!"

It was his cousin, Dolores, the poor, sick, exiled, widowed Condesa de Mendoya, who had struck the key-note to this performance. An hour ago she had sent for him to her sick-room; she had held his great strong hand between her little thin palms; she had lifted her anxious dark eyes to his fair, sunburnt face, and with strange pleading tones in her voice had made him an offer of marriage. "You English people do not make such arrangements, I know, but we Spanish mothers love to secure a happy future for our children. 'Nuela is but a child, and yet she has a woman's heart. To-morrow will make her seventeen years old. She would love you truly, were you to love her, and that you surely cannot fail to do. For is she not pretty, *mia niña*?" she added, with all a mother's pride; "such beautiful shining hair, and eyes so soft and dark. But" (seeing Jekyl was not ready with his answer) she added, "perhaps I am too late—perhaps already you love some fair young *compatriote* of your own. Is it so, Carlos?"

"No," answered Carlos stoutly. Then, somewhat mendaciously, he added, smiling, "I was thinking

only of *el Señor* Don Alfonzo and *el Señor* Doctor Selgas."

A look of annoyance flushed the Condesa's pale face.

"*Mi primo*," she said, a little coldly. "My cousin, if 'Nuela had not been disengaged I should not have asked you to become her husband." This was delivered with infinite dignity, and Jekyl felt that "some one had blundered."

But Countess Dolores did not mean to quarrel. She held out her hand again, and laid it over the young fellow's brown knuckles, and said, in a changed voice, "I have taken you by surprise; is it not so, Carlos? It is anxiety for the future that made me speak. 'Nuela has no father, and they who should be her protectors she herself has to tend and protect. You see my state of health. Girls in these days need the strong, protecting arm of a husband. I do not ask you to answer me at once. I will not hurry you. Marriage is a serious matter for man and woman alike. Think of what I have said, and when your heart answers your head, tell me, Carlos, what it says." . . . And, so saying, she sank back among her pillows, and Charles, after lifting one hand, Spanish fashion, to his lips, went his way, with a chain about his neck. It was a flowery chain, no doubt—it was made of daisies, and buttercups, and such-like spring flowers, strung together; but—

it was none the less a chain for all that. And the worst of it was that he himself had thrown just such another chain round his neck that very morning.

Three hours earlier, before the sun was rightly up, Charles Jekyl had laid his heart and his fortune (metaphorically speaking) at the feet of a young *compatriote*, not of his own, but of his cousin, Countess Dolores. It was the sweetest little *compatriote* that anyone could wish to have. A little quaint figure, dressed in the long dark cloak of the Basque maidens, and wearing over her head the twisted *mouchoir* that hides every scrap of hair. But under the *mouchoir* were a pair of laughing dark eyes and a dimpled mouth, with rosy lips like crumpled rose leaves. Jekyl had made acquaintance with her under somewhat romantic circumstances ; he had improved that acquaintance as much as after events permitted. She was no peasant-maiden, though she wore a peasant's dress. Jekyl was sure of that. He kept on repeating the fact to himself for some time after he had proposed to her. To be sure, she had not accepted him, but then no man ever believes he can be ultimately rejected. And yet—if she did refuse—ah! how pretty his cousin 'Nuela would look, coming along the gallery in his old house at home! How softly her bright hair would blend with the old dark oak wainscoting furniture! how gaily her white gown would gleam

in and out of the shrubberies! He thought his mother must have been like her, his mother whom he could not remember, but who had also had Basque blood in her veins. If only that tiresome Maria Hurtado would give him an answer! She had turned away from him as he had spoken; she had murmured something about "its being too soon." She had added, in almost the Condessa's words, and with quite the Condessa's air, that she would not be hurried, but that presently, when she had thought over the matter, which was a serious one, she would give *el Señor Inglés* an answer. And then, with a little quaint curtsey, she had flown away, fleet as a hare, down the hill, whither *el Señor Inglés* knew by experience it was of no use to follow her. It was mysterious, certainly, and it was a mystery he could not solve.

He turned again on the gravel path between the salvia-beds, which little 'Nuela had set there when she and her mother first took refuge in the *Maison Manuel*. The flowers were drooping and dying now, but every here and there, in a more sheltered spot, one blossom or so were yet to be seen. They caught Jekyl's eye. They seemed to smile kindly upon him, to greet him warmly. He began to think, he knew not why, of the glint that seemed always to be shining upon his cousin 'Nuela's long rippling hair.

He thought he would go over the whole affair, step by step, from the very beginning. He pulled a letter out of his pocket and began to read it—not for the first time evidently. Indeed, he had read it so often, he might almost have said it by heart.

This, however, was what was written in it:—“Will you come, Carlos? I am poor and in exile, and my health is precarious. It has been shaken by many sorrows. My husband’s death was a great shock to me. My son’s career has been one long anxiety. Troubles have fallen upon our country. Our *castillo* was besieged by Carlists, and burnt to the ground. My child and I took refuge here, in the little cottage built in past happy days for our little girl. ’Nuela is a little girl no longer. She needs protection, and, alas! she has no protectors. You are her kinsman; will you come and see her, Carlos——?” And here the letter ended somewhat abruptly, the signature, “Maria de los Dolores, Condesa Viuda de Mendoya,” being added in a faint and rather shaky hand, while the address, “Charles Jekyl, Esquire, Old Court, Wintertonshire, England,” was added in firm, round, altogether different characters to the flowing lines which the letter contained. . . .

Charles Jekyl was a young man. He was second cousin to Countess Dolores. He was not yet five-

and-twenty. So it took him very little time to make up his mind on this occasion to pack his portmanteau, and whirl off by the night express to Liverpool, to take the boat from thence to San Sebastian. For the rest of the time he was not responsible. He fretted and fumed over the loss of tide in the harbour, he kicked his heels impatiently at all the various wayside stations ; he behaved as the most eager lover might have done, which is, of course, only the duty of the travelling Englishman. At Irun, however, he found something to attract his impatient and wandering eyes.

The little wooden platform of the station was crowded. There were market-women with their squeaking wares. There was a town-crier with his drum. There was a gang of Carlist prisoners, guarded by a score of extremely infantile-looking Alfonsists in long blue coats. There were Basque mountaineers in their full heavy cloaks ; there were Spaniards from the plains in knee-breeches and *espadrilles*. There was Rosina with a *mantilla* over her head. There was the *duenna* in a turban hurrying after her. There was Don Basilio, " hat and gloves and hymn-book too." And all these people were shouting to one another in their own unintelligible Basque language, which must surely have been composed at the foot of the Tower of Babel. It was like looking on at a meeting of

monkeys. Nevertheless, Jekyl was sorry when the train began to steam out of the station.

As it did so, some one came flying after it. It was a young girl, all breathless and hurried. Her lips were parted, her eyes were glancing. A long cloak hung from her shoulders. Her hair was hidden away under the quaint *mouchoir* of the country. In one hand she held a basket, with the other she caught her cloak round her, and so bounded into Jekyl's carriage, the door of which happened to be ajar. The train entered a tunnel as she did so.

This tunnel just gave her time to regain her composure. When the light came streaming into the carriage once more, she was sitting opposite to Jekyl—a pretty Basque maiden, with a pair of smiling dark eyes, and two brown hands crossed over her basket. She caught Jekyl's eyes as he glanced at her, and smiled again. Then suddenly the smile spread into a laugh.

"*Hé*, Monsieur," she said half-apologetically in French. "You are wondering, perhaps, to see me here. But—but I was in a hurry, and all the second-class carriages seemed to be full."

Jekyl had not been wondering at that, certainly, for this girl, though she wore the dress of a peasant, wore also the air and manner of a lady. To be sure, the working classes in the South have always more

refinement of person and manner than those of the same rank at home. But did this girl belong to the working classes?

He glanced at her hands. They were brown, indeed; but they were also finely and delicately moulded. Then he glanced at her face once more, and made some unintelligible answer in French.

The girl started as he spoke. She looked up at him quickly. "You are English; is it not so, monsieur?" she asked.

Poor Jekyl!—his speech had betrayed him. He bowed his head in answer.

"And you go as far as Fuentarabia?" pursued the girl categorically.

Once again Jekyl bowed.

"And further still, across the water, to Hendaye," said the girl breathlessly, but this time not interrogatively.

Which was fortunate, as Jekyl's only answer must have been another bow.

"Do you know Hendaye, mademoiselle?" Jekyl asked, after a little pause. It was his turn to question now.

"Oh yes, I know it," replied the girl. "It is full of Spanish exiles this winter. From the De Mendoyas who live on the hill, to the *Zapatero* by the waterside, there are none but Spaniards to be seen."

"De Mendoya," repeated Jekyl, catching at the name. "Do you happen to know that family?"

A sudden light flew into the girl's face. Then she began to speak quickly.

"It is not a family—it is only a mother and daughter. The mother is sweet and suffering. She is torn by much sorrow, and by many anxieties. As for the señorita—hum"—and here a smile seemed to swallow up the words.

"What about the señorita?" asked Jekyl, rather impatiently. "Is she not pretty?"

"Pretty! no," replied the girl, with much decision. "Not pretty, certainly—unless you in England count red hair, and sallow cheeks, and a gawky figure as beauties. But," checking herself, "I am rude, perhaps, thus to describe one who may be a friend of monsieur's. Pardon me, I pray. The Donna Señorita Manuela de Mendoya is young. She still wears a short frock and her hair undressed. She may improve—Ah! here we are at Fuentarabia," she added, as if glad to change the subject. "Monsieur must tell me, next time we meet, whether my description is correct or not."

"When shall we meet again—and where?" asked Jekyl, rather eagerly. He was fascinated by the girl's frank eyes and noble bearing. He had never seen anything like her before. "Where? and when?" he repeated.

"Not likely—anywhere," replied the girl carelessly. The train drew up to the station. The girl collected herself and her basket. Jekyl threw the door open for her. She passed out with a pretty little foreign curtsey, and an unmistakable English "Thank you." Then, standing on the platform, with her face towards the carriage window, she added, half in Spanish, half in French, "*A Dios, Señor*; I forgot to wish you good-bye. May all luck go with you! May you be as welcome to your friends as flowers at Christmas! And, by-the-bye, if by chance you should meet the *Donnas de Mendoza*, do not speak to them of me. They know me not. They know not even my name. But to you I will tell it, if you wish. It is—it is—*Maria Hurtado*." Her voice vibrated curiously—her luminous eyes dilated—she turned away—she vanished!

When, a moment later, Charles Jekyl, with his various baggages, reached the platform, not a trace of *Maria Hurtado* was to be seen.

He turned again once more amid the salvia-beds. The scene changed. Another took its place. It was like altering the stops of a barrel-organ. *Vite*, another stop—another tune. Charles Jekyl felt that his mind was very like a barrel-organ. And it went

on playing over and over again all the tunes of its *répertoire*.

This was the tune he heard now. A ripple of light; a melody of voices; a tinkle of cups and spoons; a stir of silk and lace; a rustle of a white gown, of shining hair, of small, quick fingers, of swift, sudden movements. And by these signs, and a few more, Charles Jekyl knew that he had reached the presence of his Spanish kinswoman.

Yet, lest he should be mistaken, somebody spoke.

"You are welcome, *primo*," said a weak voice in broken English. "'Nuela! here is your English cousin."

It was the elder lady who spoke. She was lying on the sofa. She looked delicate and very ill. The girl, who had been sitting on the floor beside her, rose quickly and made a little curtsey. It was as she rose from this salutation that Jekyl perceived Maria Hurtado had spoken the truth, and that his young cousin's white gown hung at least four inches from the floor. But then, what pretty little feet she had!

There was not much more talk. The Condesa beckoned "Carlos," as she called him, to her side, and asked him a few questions about his life in England. 'Nuela poured out the coffee. She brought in wine, and served the traveller with her own hands. Never had Jekyl tasted a draught

more delicious. She fetched bread, and meat, and green lettuce. She mixed a salad with her long, slender, brown fingers. It was pretty to see her bending over her handiwork; her brow knit, as she measured the due proportions of oil and vinegar, her long shining hair dropping round her in a beautiful sunlit mist. And so this tune ended like a sweet, spun-out song; but for many a day afterwards Jekyl heard it over and over again—a soft, slow, harmonious, undulating measure.

It changed quickly. If a symphony were really like life, as some have maintained it is, its *prestos* ought surely to come in midway, not right at the end, as most composers seem to consider most fitting. That is the place for the *adagios*, and for *adagios* only. Jekyl's *presto* was certainly a queer one, and it came to him while he still wanted ten years of middle age. First, there came the bass voice of old Fernando, the ancient servitor of the family, who, grudgingly showing Jekyl to his room, assured him that it was the own apartment of his *Donna Señorita* Manuela. Then there was the full stop that followed, during which Jekyl undressed and went to bed.

After that came the *presto*.

Were the stars having a party that evening? Had Charles's Wain brought a whole waggonful of planets to the entertainment? Was *M. le Général Mars*

striving to cool his rubicund visage before he presented himself for the dance to Miladi Venus? The Big Bear and the Little Bear were not invited, of course, being Russians, but Cassiopeia had no end of partners. The noise Jekyl heard was really no louder than the song of the stars might be. There was a twinkling, a cracking, a thread of light, a sigh of sound. It was all so quick, so light-fingered, so breathless, that Jekyl in his bed could make nothing of it. One moment he thought he saw Maria Hurtado in his room! He thought she was still dressed in her cloak and *mouchoir*; he thought she carried a lantern; he thought she opened a drawer, took something out of it, and then glided noiselessly back through the door he *knew* he had *locked*. The next moment he was certain he heard his cousin 'Nuela's voice on the stairs, and she was calling out very softly, but quite distinctly, "Maria, Maria."

It was very strange. He could not understand it. He thought he would speak of it in the morning. But then he remembered Maria Hurtado's request that her name should not be mentioned to the *Donnas de Mendoya*, and there was no one else to whom he could speak. Besides, he was not sure whether the whole thing was a dream or not.

He seemed to be dreaming it all over again all the night through. The *presto* went on repeating the same bars. Then presently it changed its key. The

dawn came. Jekyl awoke. He fancied it was the spring ; he thought he heard a chattering of birds.

It was fancy indeed, for it was mid-winter. Fresh snow had fallen in the night, the sun came laggingly across the plains. But the chattering was no fancy. Jekyl drew back his window curtain. There, on the path below, brown and blithe as a robin, stood Maria Hurtado talking rapidly and eagerly to old Fernando and a woman servant who stood behind him. What could she have meant by saying she was unknown to the Mendoya family ?

He dressed himself quickly, and went out. The servants had disappeared by this time. Maria Hurtado was standing alone on the pathway. Her head was raised, her eyes were turned Spain-wards. She evidently heard a footstep behind her, but she did not turn round. She merely called out, " Make haste, Fernando, or the world will be about before I get back."

Then an answer came from some open door, " Immediately, Donna Señorita, I come." She turned round with an impatient gesture, and met Jekyl face to face.

Not one whit disconcerted was she. She made a little curtsey ; she half held out her hand, then pulled it back again, and said in French—

" *Bon jour*, Monsieur. Well, how did you find my

description of *ces dames de Mendoya*? Was it not quite correct?"

"Not altogether," replied Jekyl—but at that instant the white head of Fernando made itself seen, as he issued from a cellar, and a suspicious-looking parcel wrapped in white paper was placed in the hands of the girl. With a hasty *gracias* to the old servant, and a nod to Jekyl, she flew, fleet as the hare, down the hill. In one second she had disappeared.

It was a few more bars added to the *presto*.

Jekyl followed in the way Maria had taken. He had no expectation of meeting her, which was fortunate, for if he had expected to do so he would have been disappointed. He merely took a walk, therefore, and presently turned back to breakfast.

It was all laid and ready. 'Nuela was waiting for him. She wore her white gown, and her red rippling hair fell over her shoulders. Her cheeks were flushed, but there were dark rims about her eyes. She looked as if she had not been in bed all night. Jekyl thought of the voice he had heard on the stairs. It was not all a dream perhaps. She looked a little anxious and nervous. Her hand shook as she poured out the coffee. "Mamma is ill," she said presently. "We have sent for our own Spanish doctor." She might have said more, but at that instant that awkward old Fernando let drop the dish of cutlets he

was holding. 'Nuela started at the noise, but there was a smile on the old fellow's lank jaws as he picked up the *débris*. Jekyl felt he hated him from that moment.

And so, day by day, the symphony went on. It lengthened and deepened; it rolled its great waves round this man's soul. Sometimes it dropped into a *quartetto*, sometimes into a *trio*, oftener still into a *minuetto*—a *duetto* between little 'Nuela and himself—between himself and Maria Hurtado. With the latter, they were sung at strange times, before sunrise, beneath the light of the stars. This gave them almost the flavour of forbidden fruit.

But with 'Nuela it was different. He seldom sang with her alone. There was always an audience. There was her mother sometimes, who now and then bleated out a note from her sofa. There was the *cure* occasionally, who grunted out some bass tones. There was a doctor pretty often—so often, indeed, that Jekyl soon became tired of seeing his round cap in the hall, of hearing his cracked voice in the drawing-room.

Once he, too, sang a duet with the *señorita*. Jekyl overheard it from the garden. It was just ending as he opened the drawing-room door.

"May I not tell her yet?" 'Nuela was singing in her clear shrill voice.

"Not yet—not yet—she could not bear it yet,"

Doctor Selgas responded in deep bass notes. "How horribly out of tune he sings!"—such was Jekyl's criticism, as with a flourishing bow the doctor went on his way.

There was some one else who sang even more out of tune than Doctor Selgas, and who still more annoyed the young Englishman. This was a youthful fellow, with flashing dark eyes, and a curiously weak-looking mouth. Perhaps he was a young rising doctor, as he was brought to the house by Selgas. In that case, however, Jekyl thought he would not care to be his patient. The young fellow had evidently adopted Selgas as his model. He, too, was muffled in a cloak, and on his head he wore a round black cap. Beneath the cap clustered thick masses of short, dark, curly hair. He came but once, and on that occasion Jekyl was requested to absent himself from the drawing-room, while the duett, or the trio, or the quartett went on. He retreated to his bedroom in high dudgeon. Not a sound could he hear from thence, save now and then, when the drawing-room door was open. Then there came out a stream of voices—'Nuela's shrill and pleading; Doctor Selgas's reproachful tones; another voice, an unknown one, weak and quavering. Once old Fernando's cracked pipe seemed to be added to the others.

Jekyl, presently tired of his solitary confinement,

thought he would try the garden for a change. As he went down the stairs, 'Nuela came up. He meant to stop and talk, but she ran past him "like a flash of light." He had time, though, to see that her face was flushed, and that tears hung on her eyelashes. He felt he would like to knock down the ruffian who had caused this grief, were he a doctor, or whatever he might chance to be.

The drawing-room door was open as he passed. The room was deserted. Through the open door he could see that trays had been placed on the table, and that wine and food had been offered to the young stranger. What a fuss they seemed to be making about him. Women always do about anything out of the common. Perhaps 'Nuela dreamed that out of such stuff a *primo-tenore* might be made.

'Nuela herself had nothing of the *prima donna assoluta* about her. Jekyl recalled that fact with satisfaction. Her voice was pure and true, but it was of no great compass. Her songs were all of Spain and the *Vascondagas*. There was a tender pathos about them all. She would sing of her old home among the mountains, of the brother who played with her there, of his tricks and cleverness, of her father's death, of her brother's troubles, of his disappearance and absence. . . . Jekyl listened, and was interested. He liked her solos much better

than the concerted pieces, in which the doctor and the stranger had taken part.

Was it that same evening, or another, that the thought of Maria Hurtado seemed to take shape, and flit through the room like a spirit? Just at sunset, Jekyl had seen her fly through the garden, as was her wont, and disappear down the steep hill. The vision of her flying feet seemed to linger with him, now that the curtains were drawn and the wood fire was crackling on the hearth. The Condesa began to talk of their Basque life, the habits of the country, the dress of its people. "I wish you could have seen some of our girls," she said, plaintively, from her sofa. "They look so pretty in their *capulets* and *mouchoirs*." . . .

"I have seen one," interrupted Jekyl. "Tell me who it is, Dolores—a pretty young girl who is often about in your grounds."

"A pretty young girl—in my grounds!" repeated the Condesa, turning sharply upon her cousin, as if she were going to pounce upon him. "Carlos, you must be dreaming. There is no pretty young girl anywhere about here, except 'Nuela."

'Nuela, who at first had looked up rather curiously, now began to blush vehemently.

The subject dropped, but Charles Jekyl was not satisfied.

He would have liked to have quarrelled with

'Nuela over Maria Hurtado, as, a day or two ago, he had quarrelled with Maria over 'Nuela. " You were wrong about my cousin," he began, aggravatingly, as they met, one morning, on a carpet of frozen grass, with a blanket of snow in the sky overhead. " Her feet are so small and pretty, she does well to wear a short gown ; and her face is as beautiful as the dawn when the sunshine comes flushing over the snow-hills. Ah ! Mademoiselle, if my heart were not already gone from me to one so much more gay and vivacious, I think I should lay it at the feet of my pretty little cousin, 'Nuela de Mendoya."

Maria made no answer. Her face flushed rosily. She turned her head away—she stamped impatiently with her foot. You see, she was not so high-born as Manuela de Mendoya, and could not be expected to maintain so calm and serene a demeanour.

And so the days wore on, till at length the morning dawned whereon Charles Jekyl was destined to make one offer of marriage at sunrise and to receive another before that same sun should have reached its zenith. And the noonday sunshine brought him no light—and the hills, and the river, and the plains were dumb—and the church-bells spoke in a language he did not understand—and 'Nuela's salvia-beds augmented rather than lessened the evil under which he suffered this Christmas Eve in the Basque Country.



PART II.

Swords are clashing, clarions ring,
Tender hands but closer cling ;—
Men may fight, and kings may scheme,—
O'er them all Love reigns supreme !

JTHE day wore away. The sun set. Cold grey
shadows began to creep up the mountains. A
white mist hovered over the river. And Charles
Jekyl was still pacing up and down, down and up,
between the salvia-beds.

He was still sore perplexed.

He had received no answer. He had given none.
It was an awkward state of affairs altogether.

The dressing-bell rang. People still dined then,
though war raged round them, and “men's hearts
were failing them for fear.” Charles Jekyl heard a
dull booming sound still going on over the water as
he hurried in to dress.

It was a fête day with his cousins. That was
evident. The Condesa had left her sick-room for

the occasion. 'Nuela appeared with roses in her hair. Doctor Selgas was among the invited guests. Old Fernando had brushed up his coat. After he had taken away the dishes, he placed some champagne upon the table.

"It is Christmas Eve," said the Condesa from her place at the head of the table. "Fernando, hand the wine, and pour some out for yourself and Maria." Then, turning to Jekyl, who had looked up at hearing the name, she added, "It is our custom to make *fiesta* to-day. On this night we think of our absent friends. We drink to their health. We have often thought of you on this night, my Carlos—while yet, my husband—and my—" But here the poor lady choked and gasped, then for a second recovering herself, she cried, "*Buvons à nos absens*," and sank back in a dead faint.

It was fortunate the doctor was present. "She is thinking of her son," he said to Jekyl, as he passed him. "Let us hope some happier days are still in store for her." His skill soon brought his patient round. The toast was drunk, but all the spirit seemed to have gone out of it. Immediately afterwards, Doctor Selgas rose to take his leave.

"I have other patients to visit," he said. "If I might be permitted to prescribe once more for the one I have here, I would order bed at once. Señorita,"

in a lower voice, "try and induce the Donna Condesa to sleep."

'Nuela looked up quickly. There was a strange imploring glance in her eyes. She raised them to the doctor's face; he only shook his head, and bade them all "Good night."

So the little party broke up. 'Nuela followed her mother. Old Fernando brought in a lamp, and proceeded to shut the shutters. "There is fighting yonder," he said, holding the shutter in his hand; "does el Señor not see the red light of the torches?"

El Señor had seen them, and had been wondering what they meant. He bade the old man leave the shutters open. He sat by the window awhile. Then once more he went back to his quarter-deck walk between the salvia-beds.

The wind had sunk by this time. Very faintly now came the sound of the chapel-bells ringing far away across the river. Overhead the stars shone brightly. But it was no grand entertainment they were holding to-night. Far from it. It was only a little simple song they were going to sing—a little song that they sang eighteen hundred and seventy-five years ago—a little song that the shepherds heard, and wise men listened to—a little song that Christian children learn from lip to lip, and that is ever being re-echoed from the Throne—"Glory to God in the Highest, peace on earth, good will to

men." . . . Only, alas ! it was not peace in this little corner of the earth this Christmas of the year eighteen hundred and seventy-five.

Peace ! how could there be peace, when yonder the torches were flashing, when cousins were contesting a crown, when brother met brother face to face on the battle-field, and friend drew sword against friend, as if each were the other's sworn foe ? Jekyl fancied he could hear the war-shout, the cries of the wounded, the bugles of the victors, even here, in his cousin's dark and silent garden.

A sudden inspiration seized him. What was he doing here in these garden ways—he, a young Englishman in the prime of life, with arms and legs all complete ? His place certainly to-night should be the battle-field.

He could not fight, but he might at least aid those who had fought. He had no sword to draw, but he had a strong arm and a willing heart to succour and comfort those who were in pain. He had no political bias to one side or the other ; his duty would be to help all. England expects her sons to do their duty. This son's duty clearly lay to-night on an alien battle-field.

He buttoned up his coat with great decision. He stooped to cut himself a stick. As he did so, he heard a voice saying rather impatiently, " Come—come at once—do not linger—come directly." He

raised his head, but he saw no one. He listened, but he heard nothing. He spoke, "Yes, I am coming—where are you?" but no answer came to his words.

It must have been his fancy. There was no one about. He continued his researches after a stout stick. As he stooped, again and again he heard the voice, only it sounded farther away this time; it was fainter, and more sorrowful, as if its possessor were in trouble or anxiety. "Come"—it said—"Carlos, I want you."

Carlos looked up again, but all was still and dark. Yes, but yonder, among the bushes, was there not something, some one moving? Was it the shadow of a dark cloak? was it the gleam of a white gown? Whichever it might be, Jekyl started off in pursuit.

He sped on, down hill, through bramble bushes, over fences, till he reached the water-side. Sometimes he thought he saw Maria Hurtado's cloak flying before him. Once he made sure it was Nuela's white gown that was caught by a furze-bush. But when he reached the furze-bush the gown had vanished. And what indeed should Nuela have been doing out on such a night? Maria Hurtado might perhaps be accustomed to such scenes, but the little cousin—she was, of course, peacefully sleeping beside her mother, with her long

hair streaming over the pillow, and her little brown hands folded together on her breast.

Certainly he would see nothing more of her tonight.

So thinking, he reached the wooden landing-place. Here all was confusion and agitation. Bare-footed boatmen were driving a roaring trade, doctors were anxious concerning the freight of certain horrid black bags. Spanish grandees had come hither to try and learn something of the fate of those dear to them; women were weeping, and children were squabbling, and over it all the lanterns cast a weird and uncertain light, and above it all the buxom hostess of the "Estella" was loudly declaring that these were "bloodless battles," and that no one need go over to seek for the wounded.

"See!" she cried, vociferously, "three weeks ago there was a fight yonder across the water, in the streets of Fuentarabia, and the ambulance people came down in a hurry, and the Red Cross officers passed across the river, and all the surgeons from far and near were sent for. I myself prepared twenty beds, and not a single visitor did I take in. And all night the fires burnt on the hill-side, and in the morning we expected to see the Bidassoa all bloody, and covered with corpses. But what happened? When the day broke, all was still and silent, and when at last Carlos Diaz rowed across

and back again, he brought us word that the only casualty was an old woman who had put her head out of the window, and so got a blow on her cheek, and that the only booty the Carlists had carried away was the piano out of the Casino. It will be the same this time—there!"

But few heeded her, and the boats were put off with all speed.

Jekyl at length found room in one of them. It was further crowded with some Basque surgeons, who jabbered together among themselves. Jekyl did not speak. He watched the flickering torches on the hill-side, he looked at the darkling waters through which the boat was cutting her way. And always before him he seemed to see that white gown or that dusky cloak.

The clock struck as the boat's keel grated upon the Spanish shingle. One—two—three—nine strokes went booming through the air, vibrating slowly, and making little circles of sound round them. The doctors disappeared, chattering wildly. Jekyl struck out a path for himself, and it proved to be the right one.

He found himself suddenly upon a flat open space at the foot of the mountains. It was here the battle had been fought—the skirmish rather, for it could not be dignified by a bigger name. The Carlists had come down like wolves on the fold, but the Alfonsist

lambs had been prepared for them this time. A short but sharp struggle had ensued ; friend had fought with friend ; kinsmen had saluted one another at the bayonet point ; men who spoke the same mother tongue, who owned the same creed, who belonged to the same nation, had met here hand to hand. And some had fought and fallen, and some had striven and overcome, and now for a brief space both victors and vanquished alike had laid down their swords, and, lantern and pickaxe in hand, were going through the sorrowful work of burying their dead.

It was a sorry scene, in very truth. The ground was strewn with helmets, with swords, with drums, with belts, with motionless forms, with ashy upturned faces. Every now and then the torchlight glimmered over some half-dug grave, upon some weeping group, across some dying soldier writhing in his last agony. And some were tended by gentle women's hands, and some were left to die all alone.

On a sort of grassy knoll was one of these groups. In the centre was a wounded man, a boy-soldier rather, with slender limbs and thick, clustering curls. Beside him crouched a girlish form, who now and then held his head to her breast, and now and then gently stroked his broken arm, and spoke to him in soothing tones.

“ Is thy pain so very great, *mi Alfonzo* ? *Paciencia* !

all will soon be better. Doctor Selgas will bring a litter. Our English cousin will help to carry you; he has such strong arms. I called to him as I came here with lint from the house. He will come, I know; and when you are once within the *Maison Manuel*—when our mother is watching beside you—all will be well."

The voice ceased. Jekyl drew nearer. A burying party went by. The light from their torches fell for an instant full on the little group. Jekyl saw a white gown, a dark cloak, an uncovered head crowned with pale red hair. The white gown saw him also, and exclaimed eagerly—

"Ah! here he comes—here is our cousin, Alfonzo." But Jekyl interrupted her.

"Who is this?" he asked, gravely. "And who are you?"

"I am Don Alfonzo de Mendoya," replied a weak voice from the grass. "I am 'Nuela's brother. I am Maria Hurtado's—what am I to Maria Hurtado, 'Nuela?" asked the young soldier with a boyish laugh.

"You are Maria Hurtado's brother also," said 'Nuela, rather confusedly. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she turned to the young Englishman, and said, "Forgive me, Cousin Carlos; I have deceived you, it is true, but it was impossible for me to act otherwise, I had a secret to keep. I could not even

disclose it to my mother. Doctor Selgas forbade my doing so. But now secrets may end. A Christmas Peace will descend upon us. Forget Maria Hurtado —forgive 'Nuela," she pleaded, and then stopped suddenly, for Doctor Selgas and his litter had appeared on the scene.

But what made you take the name of Maria Hurtado?" asked Jekyl an hour later, when the boy Alfonzo, having been duly deposited in his mother's presence, and all things necessary for their comfort being within their reach, 'Nuela and he had stolen out for a little stroll on the gravel path, which so lately had been haunted by the cloak and *mouchoir*.

"It was my grandmother's name," responded 'Nuela. "It came into my head that instant. I knew we should meet again, and you would need to know my name also. We are all Marias in Spain. Even our old servant, Fernando's wife, is called Maria. But you will remember I warned you not to speak of me in the Maison Manuel. I was so afraid the secret would ooze out."

"What is the secret?" asked Jekyl, excitedly. "Maria—'Nuela—I mean, there are many things still that I do not understand."

"And I cannot explain them," she answered; "the secret is not mine. It is another's. This much, though, you will understand, that if there

were jewels to be sold, if there were a ransom to be paid, if there were an outlaw to be visited, it was not the daughter of a Spanish grandee who could do these things alone and unattended. A peasant girl does them every day. The Maria Hurtados see much more of life than we do. Hark! Carlos, the clock strikes. Christmas Day breaks. Will you not forget and forgive on this day of all days?"

Her voice dies away. Over the water a clock is striking. Its echoes sound clearly through the silent air. When they cease, a strange noise begins. Drums are struck, tambourines are shaken, castanets are played sharply and shrilly. The bells peal out, lights flash from the villages, voices rise loud and clear. Jekyl looks round wonderingly.

"They are announcing Christmas Day," explained 'Nuela. "It is a Basque custom. And they each wish one another a special good wish. Wish me one too, Carlos, for I am a Basque."

"I will wish you a whole happy year," said Jekyl, "for is not to-night your birthday? And what, *Querida*, will you wish to me?"

"I wish that every Christmas may be as happy to you as this one. I could not wish you aught better, could I?"

"No, indeed, *Bienquista!*" answered Jekyl fervently.

And then he folded the girl's slight form in his

arms, and the long red rippling locks fell over his shoulder, and they kissed each other, lip to lip, and the stars alone were witness to their vow.

Thus Charles Jekyl's mind was set at rest. Thus the Condesa's dearest wish was accomplished. Thus no longer had the cloak and *mouchoir* to trot over the frontier, for so, by-and-by, the civil war ended, and the Boy King sat securely on his mother's throne, and presently brought a beautiful young bride to sit beside him, until Death snatched her from his side. But this happened years afterwards. As for Charles Jekyl, he never cares to look beyond, and he ever loves to look back upon a certain Christmas morning, when the church-bells were ringing for early mass, when a pair of sweethearts, to whom the night had been far too long, went side by side across the frosty fields, when the Basque peasants, seeing their fair, happy faces, pulled off their woollen *bérets* and wished to them, as I will wish to you, my readers, "*Buena fiesta dichosa Navidad!*" "*A happy day—a merry Christmas!*"



DULCIE BRAND.

A Sketch in Black and White. In Two Parts.

PART I.

"Twas a green and easy world,
As she took it; room to play,
Though one's hair might get uncurled
At the far end of the day.

MRS. BROWNING.



HE was not very pretty. She was not very wise. She was not of much importance to anyone in the world. She had no mother, or brother, or sister. She was only Dulcie.

Dulcibella was a long name for such a little person. Her father had discovered the name among the dry, withered old branches of his family tree, and had bestowed it upon his little daughter. Her mother had been distressed at its length, and had proposed modifying it to Ella. Her aunt, who

owned to Italian proclivities, suggested Bella. The child, however, soon took the matter into her own hands. She called herself Dulcie!

There were not many other people to call her so—poor little Dulcie! Her mother died before the little daughter with the long name had learnt to crow at the sound of her voice. Her aunt married a scamp of an Italian singing-master, and vanished from the face of society. Her father might as well have been dead and buried too, for all little Dulcie saw of him. He was a learned man, and sat all day long among his books and papers. So poor little Dulcie was a lonely little maid indeed.

She was not an unhappy little maiden, though. On the contrary, she was the blithest, bonniest baby that ever rolled herself on the green grass, or ran a race after a butterfly. She lived with her father in a quaint little house overlooking the river. This little house had probably at one time formed the lodge to a larger house, standing further back among the trees. There was a private way between the two, and a gate at one end. It was never used, however, and the gate was quite rusty, and the paths all overrun with briars and brambles, and a tangle of weeds. The lodge itself was a funny little many-cornered cottage, all covered over with roses in the summer, and people passing by would exclaim, “What a pretty little nest!” And so it was, a very

pretty little nest, soft-lined and downy—only, alas, the mother-bird had flown from it, and there was but one little chick left within to chirrup away to itself. “It must be somewhat damp and dreary in the winter,” those same observant passers-by would remark: but Dulcie never found it so. She could bury her little nose, her little person almost, in the big china bowl of pot-pourri that stood in the hall, and fancy last year’s roses were living still; she could sit in the deep window-seat in Papa’s study, and watch the river floating by, and the boats, and the clouds; or try to count the snow-flakes as they fell on the graves that clustered “thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa,” round the old grey church on the green. And then—yes, then—sometimes Papa would close his books, and call her to his arms, and talk to her gravely and tenderly, as only men of rare deep intellect can talk to little children. “Alice in Wonderland” was not then written, but Dulcie’s wonder-book was almost as full of marvels as that delightful jumble. Sagas from the north, stories from the south, history, mythology, theology, were all crowded into it, and the child understood what she could, and made up the rest.

“Only I cannot quite make out which was best for Haga’s Frida—to love, or to be loved”—she would say, wrinkling her little forehead over the

tragic tale of the hapless Danish heroine: "I wonder whether I shall ever know."

"I wish my little girl had another little girl to play with her, instead of having to listen to these foolish tales," said Mr. Brand, stroking the little dark head that lay nestling against his shoulder.

"I wish my papa would always tell me foolish tales. I wish there was a wonder-hour every day," Dulcie would answer promptly. And poor Mr. Brand would feel a sudden pang of compunction, and promise faithfully that there should be another "wonder-hour," at any rate, to-morrow. But, alas, when to-morrow came, James Brand himself would be journeying far away (seated perhaps on a soft-footed, leathered-covered, British Museum chair) into the distant regions of abstrusest speculation, and the next "wonder-hour" always took father and daughter alike by surprise.

So Dulcie was very glad when a little girl did come at last to play with her.

She came one summer. Some people from London took the big house among the elms, behind the lodge. Their names were Sir Richard and Lady Fairfax. They had a large family—boys and girls of all ages—who soon became friends with little lonely Dulcie, in easy, childish fashion. They all liked the place so much that they bought it, after a few months' trial, and came back to it summer after

summer. "It will be better for the younger children than being in London," said gentle Lady Fairfax: "and it will be just as easy to take Norah out from here as from Lancaster Gate, when her time for going out comes." And Sir Richard, who adored his wife, and hated London, fully concurred in her opinion.

Dulcie was delighted with this arrangement. She looked forward to these summers from winter to winter. The private pathway was cleared out, the gate was pushed open, sunshine and order came flowing in once more; the children were perpetually dancing up and down between the two houses. Dulcie, indeed, almost lived with the Fairfaxes, when they were at Elmhurst. She thought them the very kindest people in the world, and though her knowledge of our globe and its inhabitants was not very extensive, still, in this instance, she was not far wrong. Gentle Lady Fairfax treated her like one of her own children. "You must come to us whenever you can, dear—whenever your father can spare you," she would say, again and again. She was so sorry for the little motherless girl. And then, how beautiful Norah was—how clever—how charming! As for Alice, Dulcie's own particular friend, she was simply perfect. There was no other word for her. She could do anything, Dulcie thought. She was barely

thirteen—only a year older than herself—and yet she could dance, and sing, and play, and speak French and German, and amuse everybody she talked to; whereas our little maiden only sang as the birds sing, and only danced out of the fulness of her own glad heart, and if anyone asked her her name, it was with difficulty she responded, “Dulcie.”

So much for the ladies. Dulcie was not quite so sure about the gentlemen. Jolly, round-faced Sir Richard, with his “quips and cranks,” and perpetual laughter, rather alarmed her. She never understood his jokes. She rather disliked his allusions to Dulce Domum. She generally laughed at the wrong places, or else forgot to laugh at all. When George was at home he helped her; but George was not often at home, of course. He was at Harrow, the captain of the school, and carrying away all the prizes. He was then about seventeen, a short stumpy lad, with a sallow face, and a pair of kind blue eyes (his mother’s gift) usually obscured by spectacles. He was the pride of the family, as far as learning was concerned. He was not at all conceited, only rather dull, for one so clever, Dulcie thought. Mr. Brand, however, did not find him dull. He liked the lad, and admired his silent, plodding ways. He soon felt for him that genuine, almost fatherly interest and sympathy, with which a generous master-mind always regards a hopeful younger brother. He poured

out all his experiences for him. He longed to help him over every rough bit of learning, to show him a hundred short cuts along the road. George was very grateful. He had a perfect passion for learning, which was not much considered by the young ones at home. It was quieter at the lodge than at noisy, overflowing Elmhurst. And so, morning after morning, the young student would come down to the little house, and pore over the books in the old study, and delight Mr. Brand's heart by his scholarly remarks, his scholarly devotion; whilst Dulcie, happy little Dulcie, who had found a little girl to play with her at last, had forsaken the old place, and long since forgotten the "wonder-hours."

Dulcie used sometimes to repeat to George's brothers and sisters some of her father's lavish praises of the lad.

"Yes, yes; he may be all that, and he is a good old boy into the bargain," Dick, the next boy, would answer, swinging himself up a tree. "But, all the same, he is a precious old fool to go shutting himself up in that stuffy room, instead of spending his holidays out here in the open air." And Dulcie rather thought she agreed with Dick upon this point.

"You must wait till you see Lewis, Mr. Brand," Alice would say; "you won't think so much of George then." And Mr. Brand would laugh, and ask the young lady whether she really imagined a man's

powers of appreciation were so limited. He was quite prepared to think a great deal of Lewis, but he need not, for that reason, think the less of George.

“Is Lewis as handsome as Captain Vivian?” asked Dulcie.

Captain Vivian was a young guardsman who had just engaged himself to Norah, and Dulcie, who had seen him twice, found in him the realisation of all her young ideals.

“Much, much handsomer!” responded Alice emphatically. “And he is as merry as Papa, and as good as Mamma, and nicer than all the rest of us put together.”

“But not such a clever fellow as George,” interrupted Mr. Brand, jealous at once for the fame of his favourite.

Lewis Fairfax was the eldest son of the family. Dulcie had never seen him. He never came to Elmhurst. He was always away somewhere with his regiment—at Windsor, at Hounslow, in Ireland. He spent his leave at Fairfax Castle in the north, or else in visiting about among his numerous friends, as befitted a young gentleman of his expectations. He rather disapproved of this suburban retreat of his family’s, and entirely declined honouring it with his presence. “We can meet in London, Mother dear,” he would say in his cheery, ringing voice. “There are my

lodgings in Jermyn Street : comfortable sofas—fine view of the opposite chimneys—lunch and tea always to be had on the premises. Come there, and rest, when you drive in for Norah's shopping, and you will find me ; but I cannot—no, I really cannot—go out to that place on the river, and kick my heels on the grass, and be stared at through the hedge by a retired grocer doing the same next door. Besides, on Saturday I am engaged to Lady A—'s concert, and Mrs. M—'s afternoon, and a regimental dinner, and the week after that we go to Windsor, and——”

So Lewis Fairfax had never yet brightened the old house of Elmhurst with the light of his countenance.

One summer, however, he came. It was the third summer the Fairfaxses had spent at Elmhurst, and poor Lady Fairfax, knocked up by wedding preparations and the prospect of parting with her daughter, suddenly fell ill. The house was in a state of alarm, and young Captain Fairfax, who was tenderly attached to his mother, came down in hot haste to visit her. Dulcie saw him arrive—a tall, fair young fellow, with blue eyes and a slight golden moustache. She was grievously disappointed. She had expected something altogether different — something of the melancholy, dark-eyed, heroic type. Captain Fairfax might possibly be handsomer, but he certainly was not so old or so interesting-looking as Captain Vivian. He had not the grand air of Norah's lover—

that superb, sublime, protecting air, which delighted Dulcie's heart, and made her long for the time to come when she, too, should have a Captain Vivian of her own. Lewis Fairfax was nothing but a boy. One could not think of him as a man at all. When his mother got better, he used to go shouting about the house, and whistling through the gardens, and teasing his sisters, just like any school-boy. Indeed, in every way, he was far more like a school-boy than the Harrovian George, who had a grave, composed air, and who when he laughed, which was seldom, seemed to be doing so more to please other people than himself. But Lewis was always laughing, with people, for people, at people, till everybody laughed round him. And to think that he was a soldier—a captain—one of the Queen's Guards—and twenty-one years of age! Dulcie knew all about that. Had not Alice, her friend, written her a long account of the gay doings at Castle Fairfax last winter when the eldest son came of age.

Captain Fairfax's impressions of Dulcie were a good deal vaguer, and scarcely more complimentary than the girl's were of the guardsman. He was ceremoniously polite whenever he met her (Louis le Débonnaire, as they called him in his regiment, could never have been anything but courteous to any human being), but he took very little notice of her, and seemed to regard her rather in the way than

otherwise when he wanted his sisters. Like his father, too, he made all sorts of jokes about her, and from the moment he saw her said she was like a Japanese. It was so true that not even Alice could contradict the statement. Indeed, directly he had said it, they all wondered that they had not thought of it themselves. Dulcie had really rather a Japanese type of face. Her eyes were long and narrow, her cheeks were dark and pale, her brown hair was brushed ruthlessly off her forehead, and twisted up into a funny little pigtail behind. She was not dressed in Japanese fashion, however, but in the stiff, prim, eminently *useful* manner in which motherless girls are always clothed by their attendants. Lewis laughed at her dress, he laughed at her face, he laughed at everything. He called her Alice's shadow, and wondered how his sister, who was actually growing up not so very bad-looking after all (here he pretended to put on George's spectacles), could have such a comical shadow as Dulcie. It was as a contrast, he supposed: the darker the shadow, the brighter the light.

Of course little Dulcie could not know all this, but she guessed part of it, and the conjecture was not pleasant to her. It made her seem stupid as well as awkward in Captain Fairfax's presence; it made her fancy he was laughing at her when he wasn't; it made her think of him continually, and

compare him in her own mind, again and again, with the matchless, incomparable Captain Vivian.

He was very good to his mother; Dulcie could see that: he was almost as tender with her as Dulcie's hero was towards his Norah. When she grew well enough, he used to carry her out on the lawn (Lady Fairfax was a small, thin, frail-looking woman, and her son was a great strong fellow, with fine broad shoulders and a manly form, as Dulcie was forced to own to herself, though his moustache was so extremely minute at present), and place her on a throne of cushions and rugs, and lie at her feet like a lover. He had not found Elmhurst such a very objectionable place after all, and, the ice once broken, he came back to it several times during that summer.

"Good boy! good boy!" his mother would say, stroking her son's hand, each time he returned to her. But as she would inevitably have said the same to any one of her children on their way to the gallows, I fear her praise did not count for much.

"I am glad he sees the errors of his ways at last," growls Sir Richard, who was sometimes a little jealous of his wife's devotion to her boy, and *vice versa*.

"Well, it really isn't half bad, lolling about here," says Louis le Débonaire, good-humouredly, stretching himself out at his mother's feet, and toying with her

dainty hands, but keeping a sharp look-out withal, lest the expected grocer should suddenly spring up unawares on the other side of the enclosure. (There was no one there to-day, however, except Alice and Dulcie mooning about together in the sunshine.) "The beauties of the neighbourhood are not striking, neither is the game plentiful, but the air is fresher than it is in London, and more serene than at Castle Fairfax, where there is usually a breeze stirring, to put it mildly."

Sir Richard growls again. Jester as he was himself, he never quite knew whether his son was in earnest or not.

"The little Japanese is improving, I think," continues Lewis, still watching over the enclosure for—that obnoxious grocer, I suppose. "If only something would put a little colour into her cheeks, and some one some decent clothes on her back, she would not be quite the ugliest girl in the world after all."

"She is quite the *best* girl in the world," cries Lady Fairfax, warmly; and Lady Fairfax's world was altogether peopled by good folks. It is astonishing what a difference people seem to find in this respect. "And George likes her too, you know."

Sir Richard's growl resolves itself into a whistle.

"By-the-bye, how is old Jo?" asks Lewis, with another comfortable stretch. "It is an age since I

have heard anything of him. Is he giving up learning for love?"

Lady Fairfax looks rather alarmed.

"Not he," says Sir Richard, quickly. "No idea of any such rubbish—means to leave all that to you, Captain Lewis, and my blessing go with you. George has taken a famous place at Cambridge. He will do well, will George."

"Ah!—he'll be an ornament to the old name," says Lewis, with something of a sigh. "He ought to have been the eldest son, Mother."

Mother says "No, no!" and strokes her boy's hand again. Sir Richard looks fondly at his handsome first-born, and thinks of the absent George—was there ever such a pair of them?—and then remarks that it is nearly dinner-time, and his lordship had better be carrying her ladyship in.

If George's career at Cambridge gave so much satisfaction to the people at the big house, it gave infinitely more pleasure to Mr. Brand at the Lodge. He was delighted, enchanted. George was his pride, his pupil, his very dear son. He had always perceived the boy's talents, always predicted his success. He followed his course now, step by step. He wrote to him incessantly, giving him good advice, and bestowing upon him the benefits of his own experience, and the fruits of his own labours. George accepted them all, and profited by them all. He was

humble ; he was grateful, as great minds always are. He would be the Senior Wrangler of his year, there was no doubt of that. And Mr. Brand would rub his hands together in glee, and talk incessantly of George Fairfax and his honours.

“ He is the first man at the University, my dear,” he would say to Dulcie, who always agreed to everything he said. “ If I had had a son, I should have wished him to have been just such a fellow as George Fairfax ! ” And then Dulcie would blush deeply. She was sixteen now, and too old, she thought, to dilate on the charms of any young gentleman, even though he were the first man at the University, and wore spectacles, the more so as he certainly was *not* her father’s son. Besides, had not Dick, most irreverent Dick, now arrayed in all the splendours of a middy’s jacket, said only the other day that Senior Wranglers generally turned out to be idiots in after life.

This was the summer after Norah’s wedding. There were other changes at Elmhurst besides Dick’s jacket. Norah was gone, and Alice was going : so, at least, thought Dulcie in her melancholy moods. Her friend had already begun to take furtive little peeps at that beautiful world towards which she was so soon to wing her flight. Dulcie was left a good deal alone. She felt a little lonely at times. There was no brilliant prospect in store for her. Some

people burst into life as butterflies ; others are born moths, and remain so. Dulcie was a moth, and a very dowdy one too, she fancied. Meantime Captain Lewis, coming back now and again during those hot summer months, found the little Japanese somewhat more improved in appearance. A wild rose seemed to have blown on her cheeks, or at least it was always there, blushing away, whenever he looked at her. She had taken the adorning of her person, too, into her own hands, and though she still adhered to dark shades, as best suited to her complexion, she knew how to introduce a touch or two of colour, here and there, with a decidedly artistic effect. "She reminds one of a wild pomegranate flower, somehow," says Dick, who had been with his ship to Malta ; and George, who happened to be at home at the time, quoted Balaustion, and said a sailor had no business with such a poetical idea.

The three brothers had met for a few days at Elmhurst : Dick from his ship, Lewis from his regiment, George from his college. George, indeed, was only going to allow himself a very few days' holiday. He was going to study all through his long vacation, to Dick's derision, and Lewis's lazy wonder and contempt. "But I felt I must have a few days' respite sometime," he said, "and I would rather spend them here than at Castle Fairfax."

"Don't you like Castle Fairfax, then ?" asked

Dulcie, who, from Alice's descriptions, fancied the Yorkshire home must be a perfect paradise.

"Oh yes—I like it," replied George. "But I don't care much about shooting, you know. And I wanted particularly to see Mr. Brand, and—"

"There he is, then, tapping at the study window," cries Dulcie, interrupting him. "Do go in to him. He will be so delighted to see you."

"I was just going to propose a row," began poor George, timorously.

"Oh, we can have our row afterwards. Do go in now. Papa will be dreadfully disappointed if you don't."

And George actually went.

George always fell to Dulcie's share, somehow. She would much rather have been rowed about the river by either of his brothers, but they never asked her, and George always did. He was always at hand, always proposing something. It was, "Come for a row, Dulcie. I saw some yellow lilies beyond Teddington yesterday. They would just do for your tank." Or, "Could we not ride to Wimbledon tomorrow? Mr. Brand wants to see the site of the Roman Camp. You can have my mare, Dulcie. She's often carried Alice, and I can ride Lewis's new charger. He's sure not to want it himself."

Once, however, Lewis made an objection, or rather an amendment, to one of these plans of George's.

"I have a fancy to see the site of the Roman Camp too," quoth he. And so said Dick, and so said all the others. "Let us have a picnic," cried a little shrill voice, still at the age of Innocence. "We might ask some people from London, and have a lunch in Richmond Park," added Louis le Débonaire. And so a party was agreed upon. It was not at all what George had suggested; but Dulcie thought it would be delightful. How much better Captain Fairfax knew how to arrange these things than did George, the student.

It was a delightful day, soft, misty, blue, vague. Dulcie rode, and Lewis rode, and so did Alice, and George, and Mr. Brand. The rest went in carriages. Dulcie rode George's mare. He was only too happy to lend it her, and content himself with a pony belonging to one of the younger children. George was not a tall man, but he was broad-shouldered and square, and looked rather absurd on that little pony. Moreover, he wore a "First Trinity" straw hat, with a dark blue ribbon round it. The hat was ugly in itself, and did not fit very well. Consequently it was perpetually blowing off, and had to be caught again, like a kite, by means of a string. Once it blew into Dulcie's face. The girl grew quite angry with it, after a time. "Why don't you tie it on?" she said, drubbing with her little foot on the stirrup. "Put your handkerchief over the top of your hat

and tie it tightly down under your chin. That will keep it on, I should think."

"You ought not to laugh, Dulcie," said George, reproachfully ; "I cannot help it, you know."

"I was not laughing," returned Dulcie, quickly ; "quite the contrary, I assure you."

But Lewis was laughing. Dulcie could see that by the motion of his shoulders. The next moment he looked round, and proposed a gallop across the common.

Before the words were out of his mouth, however, Lewis's kind heart began to smite him : the girl accepted with such alacrity ; poor George looked so dreadfully disappointed. The little stumbling pony could not be expected to keep pace with the thorough-breds, and, besides, common politeness demanded that he should jog-trot along by Mr. Brand's side, and discuss Roman sites with that *savant*. It was too late, however, for regrets now. Dulcie was already ahead, scampering over the breezy common towards the woody hollows. Her little lithe figure looked well on horseback. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips were parted, her eyes were sparkling with youth, and health, and happiness. Lewis thought of the pale graceless Japanese-faced girl of a year ago, and wondered at the change. This was an English rosebud of a girl, and a very bonny blushing rosebud too.

"Riding agrees with you, Miss Brand," he said, looking at her admiringly. "You look a whole bottle-full of medicine better now than you did when we started this morning."

"Do I really, Captain Fairfax?" said the girl with a delicious little rippling laugh. It was always Miss Brand and Captain Fairfax between these two. And then her cheeks glowed again, and she looked, at the very least, another whole bottle-full of medicine the better for the speech.

And so these two rode on, side by side, laughing and talking, and saying foolish things to each other, as people under certain circumstances always do. And the sun shone brightly, brilliantly, as it often does shine in June, though one little maiden was quite sure it had never shone thus before—at least, certainly not during the last sixteen years. And the grass glistened, and the birds sang, and even the river danced a stately old dance of its own—swaying and swinging to and fro in a slow minuet-like measure—and everything seemed to be throbbing with some strange new pulse of life, or light, or love—and why should not little Dulcie's heart rejoice and be glad too? . . .

Luncheon was spread under one of the grand old trees in Richmond Park. Lewis had sent on his own man to arrange all this. Even George, somewhat out of tune, as he felt, could not but admire the powers

of organisation displayed by his brother. The carriages drove up. George dismounted, and holding his hat-string firmly between his finger and thumb, helped the ladies out. He entered into a languid conversation with some of them. They were the London ladies, whom Lewis had invited to join the party, but of whom he had not taken the slightest notice hitherto. The children began scampering after the deer. The gentlemen discussed the various dinners they had eaten at the "Star and Garter." Through the trees, with sudden breaks of light and shade flickering over them, the rest of the party came riding.

"How long you have been," cries George, flying to meet them. "And you have not seen the Roman Camp after all ; you took the wrong turn, Lewis."

"Ah ! so we did, old fellow," replies his elder brother demurely. "Have we missed much ? Well, we must have another ride together some day then, just on purpose to visit the Roman Camp ; must not we, Miss Brand ?"

Miss Brand with dancing eyes made a glad assent. "And how did your hat keep on, George ?" she asks ; but she does not wait to learn his answer.

There was another, a humbler picnic going on under the trees at no very great distance from the one given by Louis le Débonaire. It seemed to be composed chiefly of soldiers and their sweethearts.

They were dining quietly off pork-pies and ginger-beer. Lewis fancied he recognised some of the men. They belonged to the 1st Lancers, now stationed at Hounslow, but they had been for some time at the Curragh with the 9th Guards, Lewis's regiment. He was glad to see them conducting themselves so well.

"They have nothing but ginger-pop and fizzing lemonade, you see. How they would rejoice the heart of Sir Wilfred Lawson! May I give you some more champagne, Lady L——?"

Lewis's praise was bestowed too soon, however. Just at that moment, while the young man was still speaking, and Lady L—— was holding out her glass, a row arose in the camp yonder. A woman's voice was heard suddenly aggressive—then a man expostulating—then a general uprise among the company. Sobs and oaths followed, together with words unfit for the ears of the politer company. Lewis had started up as the row began. Lady L—— was compelled to put down her glass unfilled.

"We cannot have any of this so near us," said Captain Fairfax, starting off with a stern, pale face. He looked like some knight of old, about to do battle for weak womanhood, so Dulcie thought; like some picture she had once seen of St. George going forth to slay the dragon that attacked Cleodolinda. He looked pale and stern still, if somewhat less

heroic, when he returned. Perhaps he had not slain the dragon after all. But he had quelled the row, whatever might have occasioned it; and he had quelled it quickly too. Some one else had poured out Lady L——'s second glass of champagne, but Captain Fairfax was in time to offer her a third.

“What was it, Loo?” asked Dick, with his mouth full of lobster salad.

“Only some row with a woman,” replies his brother, weighing the champagne bottle in the hollow of his hand.

“Drunk?” asks Dick, laconically.

“No; I think not. Only overcome by the potency of her own feelings.”

“The woman’s voice sounded Hibernian,” remarks Lady L——. “I heard her speak about some cherries, and she pronounced the word exactly as the Spaniards pronounce the word sherry.”

Lewis laughed—such a strange, rough, grating laugh, so altogether unlike his usually jovial, trickling *ha! ha’s!* that Dulcie started. She looked at the young man: he was pouring himself out a big tumblerful of champagne.

“Yes; I fancy she is Irish,” he said, in answer to Lady L——’s remark. “The regiment has just come over from Ireland. Lucky fellows, they are. *We’ve got to go back there, you know.*”

“But you need not go to Ireland to meet Irish

people," says Alice, knowingly. "There are plenty of them all about in the villages round; are there not, Mr. Hilton?" she asks, appealing to a little gentle-eyed curate sitting beside her.

Mr. Hilton corroborates Miss Fairfax's statement, and ventures to make a few observations of his own with regard to Irish parishioners. No one, however, appeared to be much interested in them, except the gentle Alice. The conversation became general, confused, intricate, and by-and-by the company broke up.

They rode home by another way. It was a pretty way too, through the old park, with its carpet of bracken, and its trees branching overhead, and the deer darting in and out, here and there. But the sun was lower in the heavens, and the shadows were lying long and dark upon the earth, and Lewis and Dulcie had grown very silent.

"I shall ride straight on back to town now, George," said Captain Fairfax, turning back to his brother when they reached the cross-roads. "You can send Carter after me with my things. Good-bye, Miss Brand." And he lifted his hat, and touched his horse lightly with his spurs, and was gone.



P A R T I I.

“What bolts or bars can keep love out?”

AFTER that memorable Richmond day, Dulcie Brand saw nothing more of Lewis Fairfax during the remainder of the summer.

George had his innings now. The little ones acquiesced in all his projects. Mr. Brand praised them loudly; Dulcie never objected.

Dulcie never objected, but she never grew very enthusiastic about them either. Indeed, she seemed to have become strangely silent and unlike herself in those days. She would sit for hours in her corner of the boat, her sweet dreamy eyes straying far away over the banks, and her little fingers dabbling in the water, and never heeding her boatswain's injunctions to pull this way or that. “See what dangers you draw me into,” the young undergraduate would say, with a clumsy attempt at being complimentary, while he pushed the boat off the bank, or dragged it out of a tangle of weeds, into which Dulcie had

unwittingly let them drift ; "and yet I place my fate unreservedly in your hands."

To which Dulcie would smile at him vaguely, as she neither heard what he said nor saw him sitting there looking at her.

"Is the river at Castle Fairfax at all like this ?" she asked one day. She was never tired of hearing about the old Yorkshire home, where all Sir Richard's children had been born, and most of them had been brought up.

"Not a bit," replied George. "The Howb is a narrow, rapid river, bad for boating, but good for fish."

"And—and—are you fond of fishing ?" asked Dulcie, inadvertently. If she had reflected for a moment, she would certainly have remembered that she had never seen George with a fishing-rod in his hand all the time he had been at Elmhurst.

"Can't bear it !" responded George, with a vigorous stroke of his oar. They were steering straight upon a sandbank now. "I never liked it. I remember when we were quite little chaps, we three boys used to go out fishing with the under-keeper, and I never could see when the fish rose. I did not wear spectacles then, you know. Now Lewis, on the contrary—Do take care, Dulcie, please. We shall run into that punt, next. Your left hand—pull hard !"

“ Yes, yes,” said Dulcie, with a tug that nearly sent the little boat spinning round. “ But about L—Captain Fairfax, I mean—was he fond of fishing ? ”

Love is blind, they say ; and indeed it need be so very often, if we are to have any enjoyment at all out of it. It is still an open question whether it is best to believe in good, and find it evil, or to expect the worst, and receive it too. For my own part, I prefer the former plan. One secures, at any rate, the pleasures of anticipation.

“ It is too soon yet,” says the lover to the father, as they bade each other farewell that summer. Alas, when they next met, it was too late !

The winter that followed that summer was worked through dully and drearily. Dulcie looked forward to the next summer with a strange unaccountable impatience. It came at last, and the Fairfaxes came with it—Sir Richard and his gentle lady, and Alice their daughter, and—and someone or something else besides. Dulcie saw it from the moment they arrived—a weird, shapeless figure, haunting her friends' steps, and dogging their ways. It is a familiar spirit in some households, and it has many names—anxiety, fear, conscience, remorse—but it had never yet visited the Fairfax family. Dulcie did not know its name, but she disliked its presence. Her friends' warm natures seemed to have become frozen

up by its breath. Sir Richard seldom laughed now. Lady Fairfax looked careworn, anxious, nervous; Alice dismal, abstracted, reserved. For the latter's dull looks, indeed, Dulcie thought she could find a reason, but she was at a loss to account for the altered ways of the rest of the household.

The greatest change of all, however, was in Captain Fairfax. Dulcie could not complain any longer that he looked like a boy. He looked at least ten, instead of two years older, since she had first seen him. His moustache had grown at last, thick, heavy, drooping. But that was not all. Dark lines had drawn themselves over his forehead, a set gloomy expression was painted on his face. He was evidently in disgrace with his father. He never came to Elmhurst when Sir Richard was at home, but he was down there a good deal when his father was away, which was often during that summer. Wise little Dulcie, noting all this, thought she had solved the mystery. It was a money trouble that was weighing down the hearts of her kind neighbours. Lewis had been extravagant—was in debt, perhaps. Young men in the Guards had so many temptations. She knew that Sir Richard had once before paid his son's debts; perhaps he refused to do so now. It was very wrong to be in debt, of course, but for her own part Dulcie rather thought she liked extravagant people. George, she fancied, must be somewhat of a

screw. *He* had no debts at the University. Sir Richard had told her father so last year, and had also expatiated on the smallness of the sum allowed to him, in comparison with that allowed to his brother. "But there will be all the more for him by-and-by, you know, Brand. George will have his grandmother's fortune when he comes of age; and he is a prudent fellow, is old Jo, a very prudent fellow!" said the proud, happy father, rubbing his hands together in glee, and laughing his own jovial, rollicking laugh.

And that was only last year; and now Sir Richard laughed no longer, and Lewis was in trouble. Dulcie was very sorry for him; she was sorry for them all. She had such a capacious, tender-hearted nature. Lady Fairfax, however, did not seem to care much about her sympathy. "Thank you, thank you, my dear, I am better—quite well, indeed," she would say, giving the little girl a hurried kiss, and dismissing her. "Oh, no; pray do not trouble to come round to-morrow! I shall be in London, probably, or else busy with my son." It must indeed have been a terrible grinding trouble which had thus sharpened and chilled the once gentle, thoughtful ways of Lady Fairfax.

With Lewis it was different. He, who only last year used to laugh at George's bookworm friends, and ran away from all conversation more intellectual

than the Opera or the Academy, now almost seemed to seek out the learned society of Mr. Brand, and the unspoken sympathy of his little daughter. It was true, he was wholly destitute of other companions. George was at Cambridge; Dick with his ship somewhere, ploughing the waters. Even Alice was away. She had a little private grief of her own, in connection with the curate; and her sister, Mrs. Vivian, had proposed a visit to Paris as a Lethean experiment. There was only his mother at home, and mothers, even of the tenderest description, or perhaps chiefly when they *are* of that persuasion, are rather apt to assume a depressing didactic air towards their best-beloved in disgrace. The best sort of intercourse in these cases is with strangers, or other blind or obtuse folks. Ignorance is such a blessed thing under the circumstances. It is a sort of mental back-board, hard and unyielding, but which yet gives support.

And so Lewis used to come down, day after day, to the Lodge, where Mr. Brand was very blind, and Dulcie very silent. It was a mutual pleasure to them all. Mr. Brand did not swerve in loyalty to his favourite, but he formed a more favourable estimate of the elder brother. "He is a fine young fellow," he would say, watching the young Guardsman stroll slowly away, down the little private path. "He has not George's mind, of course; but he is a

pleasant, jovial companion, and not at all wanting in wits."

"I do not think he is particularly jovial just now," says Dulcie, rather grimly.

"No; you don't think so, because the last day or two he has happened to prefer a discussion on dry matters with a dull old fellow like me, instead of listening to the foolish babble of my little daughter. Never mind, child, George prefers the babble; we all know *that*." The obtuse Mr. Brand twinkled his eyes, and felt as if he had said a clever thing.

Captain Fairfax, however, really seemed to appreciate Mr. Brand's society.

"Your father is the cleverest man I ever met; and what is more, he is a perfect gentleman," he would say to Dulcie. "It is really a privilege, as well as a pleasure, to talk to him." And then he would follow the girl into her pretty little drawing-room, and glance at the books that lay on the table, and the dainty bits of needlework scattered about here and there, and the china, and the flowers, and all the other little knick-knacks which Dulcie had gathered round her; and sometimes he would talk to her the while, and sometimes he would remain absolutely silent.

"Did you do these, Dulcie?" he asked, one day, rather abruptly, taking up some drawings that lay scattered about on the table. He had taken to

calling her Dulcie this summer, though she still adhered to her old fashion. "How nice to be able to draw like this!"

"Yes; I did them," replied little Dulcie, flushing at the words of praise. "Are—are they—do you think—of any value? I have a great many more like these; I can do them very quickly."

"Yes; they are of great value," replied Lewis, examining the drawings critically, and rather wondering at her question. "They prove that you have a great deal of natural talent, which has been well trained and educated."

"But—but—I mean in a—pecuniary point of view," stammered little Dulcie, blushing again, and more painfully this time.

"In a pecuniary point of view!" repeated Captain Fairfax, astonished. "What do you mean? Do you want a new dress, or some more of those pretty little knick-knacks? Are you short of cash just now?"

"I have—some friends—who are—I think—just a little short of cash just now," she responded, twirling her fingers together nervously; "and if I could help them ever so little—it would be—oh, Captain Fairfax, it would be"—and here she clasped her hands together, and looked up like a little saint in ecstasy—"the greatest pleasure of my life."

Captain Fairfax looked at her with softening eyes. "I think you are mistaken, little Dulcie," he said,

gently. "I think your friends have no need of any such thing; nevertheless, here is one who would value one of these drawings above its weight in gold. May I have one, Dulcie? Will you tell me which I may choose?" And the two heads bent together over the table, and the two voices rose and fell in softly answering chords, as they discussed the relative merits of the drawings.

Lady Fairfax, hurrying down to the Lodge in quest of her son, with a letter for him in her hand, heard the low-toned voices, and saw, through the open window, the fair and dark heads in dangerous proximity to each other. She started back as she saw it, and caught her breath suddenly.

"Lewis!" she cried, in a sharp, stern voice; "where are you? Come to me at once. Here is a letter from your father—from Ireland."

And Lewis, with a flush on his face, and something like an oath on his lips, pushed the drawings from him, and rose up and went.

It was about three days after that that Lady Fairfax came down to the Lodge once more. She did not ask to see Miss Brand, but only Mr. Brand, with whom she remained closeted more than an hour. She was telling him all her troubles, no doubt; and, though Dulcie thought her father rather an odd confessor to choose, she was very glad, as in this way she too, perhaps, might learn what was the

secret grief that seemed to be consuming her friends' hearts. It had nothing to do with money—she knew that now; but she did not know whether she was glad or sorry for the knowledge. It would be dreadful for Lewis to become suddenly poor, of course; but then poor people were not always unhappy. Besides, poverty was a tangible thing, and could be wrestled with, and conquered too, sometimes; whereas this horrible, shadowy thing that seemed to have crept over them all was nameless and formless, cold, grey, hidden, slimy as a serpent's track. Would the serpent itself start up suddenly some day, a scaly beast standing on its tail? Would it wrap them round in its hateful fold, and crack all their bones, and swallow them whole? Dulcie shuddered. She must certainly have been reading the *Apocalypse* that morning. She jumped up suddenly, and went out into the garden.

Lady Fairfax was standing in the hall when she came in again. Lewis's mother looked pale and worn. Her face was troubled. Her eyes were swollen. That confession, whatever it was, had cost her something to make.

"How tired you look, dear Lady Fairfax!" cried Dulcie, running towards her. "See, I have gathered these roses for you: they are the *géants de bataille*, which Captain Fairfax likes so much. Will you give him one from me?"

Lady Fairfax took her in her arms, and kissed her with all her old warmth and affection—nay, with even more. She held the girl against her heart with somewhat of that lingering, constraining tenderness with which parents embrace their children when they are about to submit them to some necessary, but dangerous operation. She seemed as if she could not bear to let her go again from her arms. “But I will not take your roses, dear,” she said.

“You must, at least, take one to Captain Fairfax,” said Dulcie, her spirits rising again under the influence of this sweet renewal of an old love. “He said that ours were finer than yours; and we have so many!”

“Then keep some for George, dear,” whispered Lady Fairfax. “He will be home soon, you know. I heard from him this morning.”

“George!” said Dulcie, half passionately, half inquiringly. And then she flung the roses from her. She was beginning to hate the name of George.

Lady Fairfax kissed her again, gravely and silently, and went her way across the lawn, down the private path to Elmhurst.

When Mr. Brand came out of his study that afternoon, he found his little daughter still in the hall. She was leaning against a marble table, gazing at some flowers that lay bruised and broken at her feet. She started as her father passed her.

“Lady Fairfax is gone,” she said, in rather a confused voice.

“Yes, my dear; more than an hour ago,” responded her father. Whereupon Dulcie started once more, and began to pick up her flowers hurriedly.

Mr. Brand crossed the hall and rang the bell. He gave some orders to his servant in a quick, decided way. Then he turned back again to his daughter.

“Did you hear what I said to Thomas just now?”

“No, Papa,” replied Dulcie, vainly trying to prop up some of her poor maimed roses in the long-necked blue china bowls.

“I told him to say to Captain Fairfax, if he should chance to call this afternoon, or any other day during this week, that we were both of us too much engaged to see him.” Mr. Brand spoke in a sharp, short manner, and when he had quite finished his remark, he looked round at Dulcie, as if to see its effect upon her.

The girl, however, made no sign.

“Do you understand?” he asked.

“No, Papa,” she replied again.

Mr. Brand’s dim eyes began to flash.

“You don’t understand!” he cried. “Then I must endeavour to make you do so. I wish you to have no further communication with Captain Fairfax during the one week longer he remains here, and therefore you had best confine yourself to the house and gardens at present. Do you understand now?”

Dulcie's hand trembled : her roses fell out of the pots, and were ruined beyond redemption.

"But why, Papa ?" she asked, with a white, scared face. She had felt the first shock of the cold, glittering steel, but the wound had not yet begun to bleed.

"Because I choose it," he replied, harshly. He had never spoken thus to his daughter before—no, not in all her sunny seventeen years of life. It went sorely against the grain to do so now, but Lady Fairfax's visit had stirred all the strongest feelings of his nature; and though he did not, and could not, and would not, share her suspicion, still it was best to err, if error there were, on the safe side. "A father's word ought to be a daughter's law, Dulcie."

"But I cannot obey without understanding ; it would be like trying to believe in nothing," cried poor little Dulcie, helplessly.

"Well, in this case, alas ! there is no need of faith," responded Mr. Brand, with rather a bitter laugh. He carried about with him the sting of having been hoodwinked himself. "The facts are, unfortunately, only too well known by sight." And then, man-like, he took up his hat and went out, and left poor little Dulcie still standing in the hall, in a perfect agony of doubt and confusion.

She was very good, however. She obeyed her father, though she did not understand, and though each day seemed to add to her puzzle and perplexity.

She never once crossed the Lodge boundaries, she never saw any of her friends from Elmhurst, during the whole of that long, weary week. She was in a strange, excited state of suspense. She feared she knew not what. She could not analyse her feelings, because such a process was unknown to her. She only knew vaguely that she was nervous, frightened, anxious. The air all round seemed to be heavy with thunder. Her mind was as a lump of lead. If she had known more she would have minded less, she thought. If we could, now and then, shift and change our aches and pains, the burden of life would be more bearable, we think, and to a man suffering from toothache a headache seems a very little thing. Only, alas! whatever some folks may say, one is *not* always the better for knowing the worst.

At last poor little Dulcie's week of suspense came to an end. She did not feel different in any way, however. Her heart was just as weary to-day as it had been yesterday: her thoughts were just as restless and vague. She only knew that Captain Fairfax was gone, and she was free to return to Elmhurst whenever she chose. She would go to-day. She had not heard anything of Alice lately—she had not seen Lady Fairfax for so long—not, indeed, since that day in the hall, when she had taken her in her arms and kissed her again and again. What had happened since then? What had happened before

it? Dulcie could not tell. She almost felt as though she had been dead for days past, and this was her own ghost walking about. Was the resurrection at hand for her? Would there be a trumpet's blast—a moment's revelation—and then—heaven or hell, for evermore?

She went across the lawn with trailing steps. She turned down the little private path in an aimless, mechanical sort of way. It seemed to her to have become grass-grown and tangled during this one unused week. She pulled up some of the weeds, and pushed back a hollyhock or two which appeared to have conceived a wild, uncontrollable passion for its opposite neighbour, instead of contenting itself with the fellowship of those planted beside it. Dulcie loved these tall hollyhocks, with their stately heads and many-coloured eyes. She and Alice had planted them there during that sweet, long-past summer when they had first learnt to know each other. And George had dug the holes, and Dick had driven in the poles, and they had all talked together of the absent Lewis, whom Dulcie had never yet seen. How well she remembered it all, and the grand opening of the little gate! They had hung a flag over it—they had made a triumphal procession through it. It was never to be closed again, the children had said; and it never was, till now.

Dulcie could hardly believe her senses. The gate

was shut, locked, padlocked ! She beat up against it like a little foolish bird—she shook the bars, she pushed and pulled, but it was of no avail. Fate was stronger than she was. The gate was shut; the old way closed up once more—the chapter of her life ended for ever. Dulcie sank back among the ferns and the grass, tired, and sorry, and sick at heart.

Presently she began to hear footsteps coming along the pathway, on the Elmhurst side. The steps came nearer, and some one called out her name very softly. “Dulcie, Dulcie!” it said; and Dulcie jumped up as she heard it. She knew both the voice and the footstep: she was standing suddenly, confused and blushing, in the unexpected presence of Captain Fairfax. But the closed gates were between them.

He, on his side, looked almost as roseate, and quite as much confused, as she did.

“I heard the gate shake,” he said, in a low, hurried voice. “I knew it must be you: I have come to bid you good-bye.”

Dulcie heard him as if in a dream. She did not offer to put out her hand: she did not speak or move.

“Won’t you wish me good-bye?” continued Lewis, sadly. “Have you, too, turned against me? What have they told you about me, little Dulcie?”

“They have told me nothing—I know nothing!”

said Dulcie, starting, and turning pale. "Only—only I promised Papa—not to speak to you again—for a week—Captain Fairfax—and I must keep my word."

And then, with a little dignified bow, she turned her back upon the gate, and went up the green pathway.

Suddenly there was a crackle of thorns behind her, then a crash of falling leaves. Captain Fairfax had forced a way for himself through the bramble hedge and the phalanx of ferns.

"For a week, Dulcie," he said, softly, laying a detaining hand on her shoulder. "The week is past, then: you are absolved. I have stayed one day longer than I had intended; but I must go now. My father has returned. Come, wish me good-bye, Dulcie; there can be no harm in that."

"Good-bye, Lewis," she answered, mechanically, unconsciously using his Christian name for the first time. A strange tide of feeling had come rushing over that dull, leaden heart of hers: she was alive once more; but whether she was alive to pain or to joy, she scarcely knew as yet. "But where are you going?" she asked.

"Back to Ireland," he replied, wildly: "back to that whisky-drinking, pipe-smoking old woman. Their inquiries were useless. I knew they would be so; I know that hell-cat would see that she was

right ; I knew I should have to go. But oh, Dulcie," he cried, suddenly losing all control over himself, " I did not know it would have been so hard ! I do not think it would have been so—if—if—I had never known you—never loved *you*!"

" Loved *me*!" repeated Dulcie, with a great, sudden light in her face.

She had not understood any other part of his speech, but she had understood those two words. Yes, yes : it was joy after all. The trumpet had sounded : she was in heaven.

Captain Fairfax seemed to be frightened by the look on her face, the light in her eyes. His mood changed suddenly.

" I ought not to have spoken," he said, almost coldly. " Forgive me, Dulcie."

Forgive him for loving her ! Dulcie almost laughed at the idea. Her hands were caught in his ; but he did not take her in his arms, as she had thought lovers always took the girls they loved, nor did he kiss her, as once long ago she had seen Captain Vivian kiss Norah. Never mind—he loved her ; had he not said so ? What mattered the rest !

" You will not be away very long ?" she said, looking at him wistfully with innocent eyes. " You will come back to me soon, won't you ?"

" Oh, Dulcie, Dulcie : don't, my darling, you will break my heart !" cried the young man, with a groan.

And then he caught her in his arms—he could not help it; he strained her against his heart; he pressed one kiss upon her forehead.

“It will not be for long,” murmured the child again: “you will come back soon, Lewis?”

But, even as she spoke, a damp, chill, death-like fear seemed to be creeping over her. Lewis put her away from him. He set his teeth: he groaned aloud—

“Dulcie—I am *married*! It began long ago, before I was of age: it happened last year. My father and mother will never forgive me. They have been trying to find a flaw in the arrangements, but they have failed to do so. She—Cherry—my *wife*, is the daughter of a lodging-house keeper in Dublin. Do you remember that day at Richmond? Great God!—what is this?”

Dulcie had swooned away. She heard the first sentence; then she caught her breath with a gasp, and snatched her hand out of his, and fell back as one dead upon the grass.

When the long-expected George came back to Elmhurst at last, he travelled away again almost immediately: he took the night express down to Holyhead; he crossed the water; he landed at Dublin; he inquired instantly for Captain Fairfax’s lodgings.

After innumerable mistakes and a great loss of

time and patience, he found the house at last. It was the dingiest one in a dingy street. A little bare-footed maid opened the door to him. He was shown into a room full of smoke, and perfumed by something stronger still. An old woman sat by the fire, with a suspicious-looking, short clay pipe in her hand. A younger-looking woman stood by the window, nursing a little wailing infant. She was gentle and delicate looking, and dropped George a curtsey when he came in.

“Yes; these were Captain Fairfax’s rooms,” she said, in answer to George’s question. “He was out now, but she expected him back directly. Would the gentleman wait?”

And she swept the dust off one of the chairs (it needed it, certainly) with the tail of the baby’s frock.

Yes, George would wait. He took the proffered chair; he wanted to say something to her, but could think of nothing except the baby, a topic which was soon exhausted, on his part at any rate. She told him it was a boy, and its name was Richard. Then they mutually subsided into silence. She spoke with a strong Irish accent, but her voice was low-toned and soft.

The old woman glowered at him over her pipe.

“Sure I’ve seen ye before,” she growled surlily. “Faith, I remember now. ‘Twas at Richmond that day ye were there with Lewis.”

George shrank at hearing his brother's name spoken in that familiar way.

"I am Captain Fairfax's brother," he said, in a tone which implied he did not mean to say anything more. And then he waited in silence till Lewis came in.

The greeting between the brothers was not very cordial. Both the women's eyes were upon them.

"You must come back with me at once, Lewis," said George. "My mother sent me for you. She—*she* wants you."

"His mawther's always wanting him," said the elder woman, with a coarse laugh. "'Deed and he ought never to have left her apron strings." But the younger woman fetched a little bag, and silently folded up something in it. Then she lifted up her baby to be kissed, and looked after the young Guardsman wistfully as he left the room.

"How is she?" asked Lewis excitedly, as the brothers got out into the street.

"She's better and she's worse," replied George, sadly. "The fever has left her, but she is terribly weak. There is no *immediate* danger, the doctor says."

Lewis took off his hat, and drew a deep breath. It seemed as if the atmosphere of the house he had just left had suffocated him. Then he held out his hand to his brother sympathetically.

"Mother has nursed her like a mother—like *our* mother," continued George, turning his head away, as if not daring to trust himself to accept his proffered sympathy. "And Alice came over from Paris, and I was there too, for a day, you know; and she was very sweet and gentle with us all, but it was easy to see there was some one else she wanted, and so at last I proposed to fetch you."

"Poor, poor Jo!" said Lewis, heart-brokenly. "Have I ruined your life as well as hers!"

"She brightened up after that," continued George, still unheeding his brother's sympathy. "She said, 'Thank you, George.' (Her voice was very weak. It sounds already a long way off) 'Lewis must come first, and then his wife.' And, Lewis, think: she has already softened father's and mother's feelings with regard to your wife. They talk of her often now."

"My God, has she?" cried Lewis, passionately. "Oh, George, she is an angel:—but what—what—what—have I not taken out of your life?" And the elder brother fairly broke down.

It was the younger brother's turn to offer sympathy now. "Do not think of it so," he said, and his voice trembled as he spoke. "Think of her rather as an angel from heaven, who came among us to give us joy for a time, and who is going to leave peace behind her. She could not stay long.

Her constitution was naturally delicate, her nerves too finely strung. Her mother died young, you know. Dulcie is too good, too pure, for this world." And I think, before the brothers reached the water's edge, their hearts had rolled out to meet one another once more, and the old boyish love, deep, and strong, and silent as the currents of the sea, was renewed between them.

They carried her out on the lawn. She had been panting all day for a breath of fresh air. They laid her under a shady tree, from whence she could see the green pathway, and the white gables of Elmhurst peeping through the elms, and the blue shining river beyond, and the church, and the graveyard, and all the old sights she had looked upon since childhood. She thanked them silently with her own sweet smile. She almost looked herself again when she smiled, for her face had always been so wan and white, like a faint, pale flower. One hardly noticed the changes illness had wrought upon her, nor the signs of a coming greater change still. It was only by her stillness and her silence that Dulcie was Dulcie no longer.

Towards sunset, however, she grew a little restless.

"They are late, are they not?" she asked anxiously. "Surely the train must be in."

“Not yet, I think, dear,” replied Lady Fairfax, looking at her watch. “It is not time yet.”

“Oh, but it is——; I heard the clock strike!” cried Dulcie, suddenly giving way to that overpowering panic that seizes sick people sometimes. “The train must have gone wrong; or perhaps it has come in, and they haven’t come in it. Perhaps George could not find Lewis after all. Oh, Lady Fairfax, what shall we do—what shall we do?”

“My dear,” said Lady Fairfax, clasping her in her arms, and holding her close against her heart, “do not be afraid. George will not fail us; he has never failed in anything yet, you know—except—except once.”

The girl grew calm in a minute.

“Poor George!” she said, hanging her head. “That was not his fault. Forgive me, Lady Fairfax; I was frightened, I was ill. They will come, I am sure; but—but—if they don’t come in time, you will remember your promise, will you not? You will forgive your son—you will love his wife—for——”

“For your sake, Dulcie,” cried Lady Fairfax, with wet cheeks and shining eyes. “I do not think I ever loved you enough, my child.”

And then the poor little girl began to ramble a little; one could scarcely tell whether she knew what she was saying or not.

“Cherry—her name is Cherry, is it not? Lewis said so, and that woman at Richmond said so too. I fancy her a Cherry with laughing eyes and beautiful round red cheeks. (And here she touched her own pale ones.) Lewis used to laugh at my brown face, you know. And Sir Richard likes pretty people too. He will like Cherry—he must like her; and you will love the baby, dear Lady Fairfax?” There was a little tone of regret in her voice here and there, and by-and-by words seemed to fail her altogether. . . .

She recovered herself, however, before the young men arrived.

“It was good of you to come,” she said, giving a hand to each. “I was afraid you would not be in time. I should have liked to have seen your wife too, Lewis, but that cannot be. And I must not keep you now; your father and mother want to talk to you about her.” And, so saying, she withdrew her hand from his, and laid it, white and trembling, over George’s brown knuckles.

“Forgive me, George,” she said, looking at him wistfully with her sweet, misty eyes.

“My darling, my darling, I have nothing to forgive. I have loved you—I shall love you—always.” And the grave, quiet fellow—the Senior Wrangler in a few weeks’ time—sank down on his knees beside the dying girl’s couch.

The sun dipped behind the trees ; a little wind sprang up. It blew some of the angels' white feathers across the blue sky ; it sprinkled a handful of brown leaves over the girl's white dress. Dulcie shivered.

"See," she said, faintly, holding up a leaf, "the winter is coming. I never liked the winter. It was always the summer I looked forward to from year to year—but now it would all be so different——"

"May I carry you in ?" asked George, diffidently. "The sun is setting. It is getting cold."

"No—not to-night—thank you, George," Dulcie answered, gently. "Papa must carry me in to-night. Will you call him to me, please ? I want him to take me into his study, and hold me in his arms once more ; I want to be a little child again—to have what I used to call a "wonder-hour"—to tell him that I do not know, even yet, which is best in life—to love, or to be loved——"

Alas ! long before that last "wonder-hour" was over, the father was holding a lifeless child against his heart, and little Dulcie herself, let us hope, had passed away to that region where all wonder ceases, and all cravings end—where the loving and the loved alike find their heart's delight in the all-satisfying presence of an all-perfect Love !



RALPH CAMERON'S MODEL.

A ROMAN GHOST STORY.

Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?
Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep ?

KEATS.



HE sun had set. Another golden Roman day had come to an end. The *Angelus* had been rung and sung. The sightseers were wandering down the Pincian Hill. Mists were rising; shadows were falling. It was an unwholesome hour, but it was sweet, fair, and pleasant to the senses, as other unwholesome things have a way of being. The soft, faint air seemed veritably to have a breath of heaven in it. A sudden star darted into life in the east. High overhead the sunset lights were burning out in the sky. Far away, over the plains, the purple hills were putting on their night-caps of cloud and mist. The Eternal City lay in shadow, but its bronze archangel, with his drawn

sword, stood out sharp and distinct against the "daffodil sky;" while higher still, and higher, the great grey dome of St. Peter's loomed over all. It was emblematic of its Church's destiny—so, at least, Ralph Cameron thought. It pretended to be a light to the world, but its very shape only suggested an extinguisher.

Ralph Cameron came wandering down the Pincio too, but not amidst the other sightseers. He was a curious, odd, reserved sort of fellow—so people said; reserved, inasmuch as he was a Scotchman; odd, because hitherto the gratification of his artistic feelings had stood him in lieu of friends. It is well when the Philistines can speak of their natural enemies, the Bohemians, in such measured terms even as these.

Ralph Cameron, however, had not yet been more than a month in Rome, and the few men he knew in the Holy City might be counted on the fingers of one hand. They were all artists, like himself, but higher up on the social ladder. They were rather startled by their new comrade's vigorous efforts to tread in their footsteps.

"You must work, *amico mio*," they would say kindly, and not ungenerously. But they did not know how much such advice was unneeded in this case.

Poor young Ralph was eager enough to work, to

study, to paint all that came in his way. His whole career, his whole life's future, depended upon his industry now. It seemed cruel, but it was true, that unless the young fellow succeeded in making some mark on his profession during this year's residence in Rome, he would have to return to his father's counting-house in Glasgow at the expiration of that time. Scotchmen have such an especial horror of what they call "a niggling life"—for their sons, that is to say.

But Ralph meant to make his mark. He meant to do something with his time and talents. Only he was not quite sure what. If the days were but a little longer—so he would say to himself—he might paint a landscape after the manner of Corot, all soft and suggestive (he did not think meanly of himself, you see); but the sunset always came just as he was getting into the swing of his work, and now that it was November it would come sooner and sooner each day. Or if he could but get a model to sit to him by moonshine (there was a full moon last night), he would give the world another "St. Agnes' Eve," only *his* Madeline should not wear green satin stays—of that he was confident. But the pity of it was, he could not get any model to sit to him by moonshine. They seemed to have an old-fashioned notion that night, even a moonlight night, was created for sleep.

And so Ralph must put his ideas to sleep too, and

go back to his usual work of copying from casts. It was very dull, and the poor fellow had grown so weary of it. Besides, what would they say in Scotland when he exhibited, as the result of his year's residence in Rome, various landscapes, more or less successful, a few stereotyped studies from stereotyped models, such as Stella and Beppo, and innumerable sketches from plaster ears, noses, eyes? . . . And yet this young fellow was not without a certain amount of originality, and he knew it, too. But the law of routine, the demon of conventionality, invented and conjured up by feeble minds to hide their own deficiencies, had well-nigh swamped him. He "felt chilly and grown old."

He felt chilly, in very truth, when he got down to the Piazza del Popolo. Perhaps he had been sitting too long on that low wall overlooking the shadows. Anyway, now he shivered. It was all so chilly and dismal. A cold blast came blowing up from each of the three streets—the Corso, the Ripetta, and the Babuino; a fourth came sweeping in from the Via Salara. Ralph felt as if he were inside a bellows. The obelisk in the centre ought to have been dedicated to the wind instead of to the sun. And those statues hovering over the porch of St Maria del Popolo, surely they were but frozen figures of the phantoms that used to haunt the place. Ralph's imagination was certainly a little over-strained to-night.

He went slowly down the Babuino. The people standing at their shop doors greeted him pleasantly as he passed, and wished him "buona sera." He scarcely returned their greeting, but went on, still slowly, down the narrow twisting Vicolo dei Greci, and from thence into another vicolo, so small and dirty that it had no name at all, but at the end of it loomed the great gloomy Palazzo Maldavone.

The Palazzo Maldavone has stood there for nearly five centuries. Its tower overtops the dome of Santa Maria del Popolo, hard by. The outer court is larger than the church itself, but it has no better approach than the poor little vicolo aforesaid. Once—years ago—the late Marchese proposed pulling down some of the smaller houses, and making a carriage road from his palace to the Corso. The engineer was found; his plans were drawn out; the owners and inhabitants of the houses willingly agreed, for ample compensation had been promised them. But when it was represented to the Marchese that the ghosts of the former inhabitants of those houses would probably haunt his road, he abandoned the project immediately. And, after all, it would have been but of small service to himself or to his family, for he died shortly after, and Don Stefano, his son, never resided in the Palazzo.

There were various reasons given for the non-residence of Don Stefano in Rome—so many, indeed,

that it was not likely the true one could be amongst them. When people offer us a thousand excuses, a thousand apologies, we may be very sure it is because they have not a single good or valid one to bring forward. And so of Don Stefano. It was said he did not live in Rome because the air did not suit him—because his wife was a Florentine—because his children wanted education—because (this was from an Ultramontane quarter) his views were too broad to be packed in comfortably under the shadow of the great dome—because (this was from old Antonio in the porter's lodge) Donna Giulia, his sister, was no longer there to share the palace with him. In all of which there was a grain of truth, no doubt, but none of them was the real reason, though perhaps that of old Antonio came nearer the right one than the rest.

So the old palazzo stood there, gloomy and deserted. Old Antonio lived in the porter's lodge, and Teresita, his wife, tried to keep the place as clean as she could. But it must be owned that her capabilities were not very great. The lower part of the palace was let out in apartments, as is often the case in Roman houses, even when the owners themselves occupy the rest. But somehow the natives did not seem to take kindly to rooms in the Palazzo Maldavone. There was a German student, however, living in the great yawning salon on the ground floor (he

was as dirty as a pig and as noisy as a bull, poor old Teresita used to say), and an American sculptor and his statues occupied the rest of the rooms on that side of the court. And then presently Ralph Cameron came, and took up his abode opposite.

When Ralph's mother in Scotland heard that her boy was living in a palace in Rome, she wrote and urged him to give up such an extravagant home. Poor Ralph! I do not think his extravagance on this score would have made much difference to a pauper's purse!

The entrance to Ralph's room was through an inner court. The outer court opened into the narrow vicolo —the inner one was, of course, the best part of the building. It was here the family of the late Marchese had lived. The two courts were connected by the tall tower, which also served as another exit or entrance.

This tall tower is the most picturesque part of the palace. The roof is carved, and on its cornices are the shields of the Maldavoni, and of all the families with whom they have intermarried. It has, besides, four windows to the front and a broad balcony on the first floor. So far, both sides of the tower are alike in both the courts. But here comes a difference. On the outer side there is a narrow ladder-like staircase, apparently cut out of the wall of the house, and leading up from the court below to a little iron gate in

the balcony above. On the inner side no such balcony is to be seen.

“That was the father confessor's tower in old days,” old Antonio said, as he showed Ralph over the place; “and that staircase was made so that he might go up and down and in and out at all times to study and to pray. But the late Marchese had no private confessor, though he was a very pious man, too, and brother to a cardinal besides.” Then he added in an altered tone—“So the tower was last occupied by Donna Giulia, the Marchese's daughter, and the sister of Don Stefano. But that—yes, that will be twenty years ago when next the bells ring out for the Ognisanti.”

“And did Donna Giulia go up and down that staircase too?” asked Ralph, in his curious Italian.

“Donna Giulia has gone up some staircase straight to heaven—straight to heaven!” said the old man, solemnly. And then not another word would he utter.

There was evidently some mystery about Donna Giulia, and in the first days of his residence in the Palazzo Maldavone Ralph Cameron endeavoured to solve it. Presently, however, his mind became so much occupied with his work, with his wish for longer sunshine, and his desire for a moonlight model, that he ceased to think about it. Still, sometimes he would try and picture to himself how

the palazzo must have looked in the old Marchese's days, when lights were flashing in every window and horses were tramping in the great courtyard—when voices and steps resounded down the great echoing staircase, where Donna Giulia herself, with sweet, calm eyes, looked out on the world from the tall grey tower.

He was thinking of this to-night as he came down the narrow, dusky Vicolo dei Greci, and turned into the little alley, which was narrower and duskier still, being shut in at one end by the eternally gloomy Palazzo Maldavone.

But—but—were his eyes deceiving him? or was his fancy playing him a trick? Had the picture he had only painted in his mind come to life before his eyes? What was that shining building yonder? and where was the dark palazzo that contained his studio?

There were lights flashing from every window. There was a horse champing impatiently in the courtyard. There were steps and voices echoing and re-echoing up and down the long galleries. It was all exactly as he had pictured it, except—except the calm eyes that should have been watching from the high tower. But then from where he stood at present he could only see half of that tower.

Old Antonio came flying out of his lodge to meet him.

“Good news—good news, *signore mio!*” he shouted,

waving a paper in his hand. "Good news has come to me to-day during your absence. The Marchese Don Stefano is about to return to his palace. I have received his commands. The apartments are being set in order. It is possible that our caro Marchese may be here by to-morrow morning." The old man's excitement was at the bubbling-over stage, and he could hardly restrain himself from embracing the young Scotchman.

The young Scotchman's words, however, simple and natural as they were, suddenly dispelled this effervescence.

"Good news, indeed," he said, rather absently. "And Donna Giulia—does she return too?"

The old man's face changed suddenly.

"Eh! *signore mio*—do not you jest about that," he said, almost piteously. "We do not know, any one of us, where the blessed Donna Giulia may be, so how can we tell whether she will ever return to us or not? Yet I for one," he continued, clasping his old brown hands, and lifting his eyes to the starry sky—"I believe that I shall know somewhat of her, some day—before I die."

"So do I," repeated Ralph, whose impressionable nature was much moved by the strangeness of the old man's face and manner. And perhaps, for the moment, he believed it too.

They went on together through the outer court.

As they turned under the archway which led to the inner court, the clock overhead struck seven. This was the signal for the workmen to leave off work. Old Antonio bustled away to pay their wages. Ralph stood under the archway, listening to the clock's deep-drawn sighs.

Rapidly, one by one, the lights were put out. Noisily and fast, the workmen clattered away. Only one light was forgotten, and left burning in the farthest corner, near the tower, from one of the windows of which a single figure was leaning and looking out.

Ralph Cameron took three steps forward out from under the archway. Then he stood still, as if rooted to the spot.

The figure was a woman's—tall, slight, and shadowy. Her dress was white and gauzy; it was cut after some ancient fashion, and finished off with a lace collar about the throat. One little white hand rested on the window rail. The face was lovely; the lips were parted, as if about to speak. The great dark eyes rested upon Ralph's with an expression he had never seen in any face before. It was pleading, beseeching, compelling, and yet full of a divine patience and resignation. Involuntarily he fingered his sketch-book. Here, at last, was the model so long desired.

The figure made no objection. The lips, indeed,
_M

trembled a little, as if longing to say something which they could scarcely bring themselves to utter. But beyond that, neither face nor figure moved. Ralph Cameron sketched it all, as he stood there in the court below.

How long he was about it he never knew. The moon rose over the grim archway, and flooded the tower and the court with a great wave of silvery light. The forgotten candle burnt itself out on the upper story, the workmen's footsteps died away in silence—even old Antonio's voice had ceased at last—but still he stood there on the pavement, and still that figure leaned out of the window, over the balcony, in the high tower. . . .

Suddenly all the bells in the city began to toll at once. “Boom! boom! boom!” so they went, thrilling through the still, dark air. The feast of the saints was over, that of the dead was about to begin. Ralph shivered.

Twenty years ago, on the feast of the Ognisanti, Donna Giulia was living in that tower. Old Antonio said so. On the following day, on the feast of the dead, where was she? Old Antonio did not know.

When the last tolling bell had vibrated into silence, the circles of sound widening slowly, till they were merged at last in the universal stillness, another tone throbbed through the air. It might

have been the voice of a star, so high and clear and far away it sounded. But it was—the voice of the figure at the window. . . .

“ You—are—English,” said the voice, and it spoke in English too, but with curious little gaps between each word.

“ Yes, I am English,” replied Ralph, as if in a dream; “ or, to speak more truly, I am Scotch.”

“ Ah! Scotch, that is even better, you will be the more likely to help me. *He* was Scotch too.” . . . And those lovely lips parted with a heavenly smile.

“ What can I do for you? ” asked Ralph, puzzled.

“ Bury me,” replied the figure promptly. And here poor Ralph, brave as he was, could not help giving a little shriek.

“ Oh—do not be frightened,” pleaded the voice, with thrilling earnestness; “ I have gone to so many, but they have all turned from me, and I cannot rest till my bones are laid in consecrated ground. My brother Stefano would not listen to me when I sought him the first year. And now he has gone away, and I have no other chance of seeing him. Of the others, some have been frightened when I appeared to them, others have even mocked me, and laughed me to scorn. But you are different; you have make a sketch of me—you owe me somewhat. Do this for me. Lay my bones at rest; set my weary spirit free. It is only once a-year—on

this night—that spirits are permitted to speak with mortals; only twenty times in twenty long years have I made this request. And always it has been denied me. Do not you deny me; do not you fail me!" repeated the voice, with sudden energy; "promise me you will not fail me!"

"I promise," said Ralph, solemnly. And indeed it was a solemn moment.

"Listen, then; I will tell you all. I am Donna Giulia dei Maldavone—her spirit, I mean. She was, in the flesh, her father's favourite child; she followed his tastes; she entered into all his pursuits; it was she who suggested the idea of a new road to the palazzo, she who found the engineer, who helped to draw out the plans. He was a Scotchman, as you are, only he was handsomer. His face was dark and pale, but his eyes were as blue as are our Roman skies. How grand he used to look when he came swinging into our great wide dining-hall. He had the ways of a king, and yet to most of the Maldavoni he was only a superior sort of mechanic. Donna Giulia did not consider him as such, neither did Don Stefano. But presently Don Stefano went away to find his wife in Florence, and Donna Giulia was left alone. Can you understand what happened? Love came to two hearts within the Palazzo Maldavone, but, after having acknowledged his presence to themselves, and to each other, they knew not what to do.

To confess an attachment to Marchese Giorgio was impossible ; to own a marriage at some distant period, seemed—at least—more practicable. At any rate, *then* it could be neither hindered nor helped. So it was all arranged. Donna Giulia was to leave her home on the night of the Ognisanti. Her lover would meet her with a boat at the Ripetta steps. The way out through the tower was easy ; it had been made so expressly for one of our father confessors. Donna Giulia sat at her window all day long, watching the slowly moving hand of the clock over the archway. When the moment came, however, she was nervous, perhaps. She ran part of the way down the tower steps, then flew back, frightened by a footstep in the court below. She missed the little iron gate in her hurry and confusion, and stumbled over an unsuspected trap-door, which opened and closed again instantaneously over her head. She fell some little distance, and then found herself in a narrow chamber, from which there was no exit, nor any means of making herself heard. Here—here, then, she slowly—slowly starved to death.” . . .

There was a long pause. The voice was silent. At length Ralph spoke—

“ And the lover,” he asked, “ what became of him ? ”

“ He is at rest,” replied the voice, suddenly

growing hollow and faint. "He was drowned that night in the Tiber, but his body was recovered and buried in the Protestant cemetery. Perhaps some day, when Donna Giulia's spirit is released—when her bones lie at last in sacred soil—they may meet again—these two loving hearts, where—But hark! there is my signal." (The clock struck one.) "You will not fail me, will you—will you—will you—?" pleaded the voice, growing fainter and fainter, although somehow the figure seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. It was floating through the air—it had fallen out of the window—it had lost its balance—it would be dashed to pieces on the stones below.

Ralph rushed forward with these words on his lips. He would catch that lovely figure. He would save that beautiful woman. He stretched out his arms—he stood on tiptoe—he might do it thus, surely. Yes!—she was near now—very near. He could feel the stir of her dress—he could see her eyes softly closing. She was content then to fall against his breast. How his heart beat!—he clasped his arms together—his fingers met—they held—nothing!

When the morning broke over Rome's seven hills, and the first rays of the pale November sun came streaming in through the wide archway, they rippled

over a little crowd assembled in the courtyard of the Palazzo Maldavone. Ralph Cameron lay on the stones, white and motionless. The German student had seen him there, as he went out to his breakfast, and he stood still to look at him. The American had followed his example. Some children had come straggling in from the Vicolo beyond, and were standing round, too, staring with great awe-struck eyes. There was also a woman with a baby in her arms.

Presently they all began to talk at once.

“Moon-struck,” pronounced the American, with a critical eye, and certainly with a speaking nose.

“*Ach, lieber Gott!*” ejaculated the German, “if one could but get a *schopp Wiener bier*, that would bring him round in no time.”

“How still he lies,” said the woman, peering over with her gentle dark eyes; “and how beautiful he is, just like the marble Son on his Mother’s knees, in our great San Pietro yonder.” And her tender Italian eyes filled with tears.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard through the still morning streets. Old Antonio had gone to the station to meet his master. Teresita stood at the lodge looking out, caring for nothing that might interfere with her being the first to wish, “*Il ben venuto*” to “*Il Signore Stefano, Marchese dei Maldavone.*”

Meanwhile the sound of wheels grew nearer. A carriage rolled in under the archway. A pale dark face with a pair of brown eyes, not unlike those that had watched from the tower window, only without their pleading expression, looked out and asked, "What is the matter, Antonio?"

"It is only some affair of the lodgers, Eccelenza," replied old Antonio, springing down from his box seat with surprising youthfulness and agility. "I will go and turn them out."

"No, I will go myself," said the Marchese. "Open the door, Antonio."

The little crowd was still pressing round the poor prostrate *pittore Inglese*. None of them recognised Don Stefano, or no doubt he would have proved a counter attraction. But no one, except the woman, could ever have seen him before, and she was on her knees, before poor Ralph, trying to chafe his cold hands. One of the children was taking care of the baby, another had picked up Ralph's sketch-book, and was fluttering its leaves open in the sunshine.

"What is that?" cried the Marquis, in a voice so fierce and stern that the child dropped the book in dismay. It slipped down against his knee, the blank page downwards, and the sketch blown back upwards, the little brown leg making a sort of prop for it.

Old Antonio darted forward. He turned pale.

"*Che, che, Eccelenza!* Ah, see—it is the Signora

Giulia herself!" he cried, crossing himself, and speaking in curious broken sentences. "Does the Signore Stefano not remember? See, her hands, her eyes—her beautiful eyes, her dress—even her lace collar! Ah, how I recall it all! But how—when—where can the *pittore Inglese* have seen her, to make a picture of her like this?"

"Leaning out of the window, over the balcony, in the tall tower," said a voice that made them all start. By the aid of the kindly Roman woman, the *pittore Inglese* was coming to himself again.

The Marchese and old Antonio looked at each other blankly.

"You have been blabbing, Antonio—you have been making capital out of that story," said Don Stefano, sternly.

"Nay, *signore mio*, that would have been impossible," replied Antonio. "Besides, what could I tell?"

"He knows nothing, but I know all," said Ralph Cameron, raising himself slowly, and facing Don Stefano. "I know that your sister, Donna Giulia, lived in that tower. I know that her lover was beneath her in rank, and therefore she feared to confess her love to her father. I know she had planned to run off with her lover—that she flew down those stairs on the night of All Saints, twenty years ago—that she was frightened, and ran back

again, and so fell into a trap-door at the end of the balcony, and——”

“There is no trap-door on the balcony,” interrupted Don Stefano, angrily. He and Antonio had hitherto been listening in breathless attention. “Signor Pittore, you are dreaming.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Ralph, wearily. “All I know is—she told me so. Why do you not go and see?” And his head fell back upon his kind nurse’s lap.

.
There is very little more to be told. Of course Don Stefano and old Antonio did go and see; and of course they found the hitherto unknown trap-door, with the dark room underneath, built in between the two walls just as has been described. Perhaps they found in it other bones besides those of poor Donna Giulia.

“But who knew of the room?” said Don Stefano, looking with puzzled eyes into the face of his faithful servant.

“Those who made it, and who used it,” replied that sagacious servant. “This was always the priest’s tower.” . . .

They laid poor Donna Giulia’s bones to rest in the marble chapel belonging to the family in the Church of St. Maria del Popolo hard by. When all was over, Don Stefano confessed that his sister’s spirit

had appeared to him on the first All Saints' Night after her disappearance ; but he had treated it as a freak of his imagination, and had tried to think no more of it. Only he would not live at the Maldavone Palazzo since then.

Well, her gentle spirit was at rest at last.

As for Ralph Cameron, must it be added that he was attacked by a fever on the same day that all this happened ? Some people said it was Roman fever, caught by staying out too long among the dews on the Pincio. Others affirmed it was brain fever ; he had been working too hard of late. Don Stefano and Antonio, however, thought differently, but they said nothing—they only tended him carefully, and presently had him removed to better and larger rooms. But even then, when his mother from Scotland came to nurse him, she did not see any cause to reproach him with great extravagance. Under her judicious care, he recovered in course of time, and has since painted a picture of Donna Giulia, as she appeared to him that night, for the Marchese's own private room. There is no longer any talk of his returning to his father's counting-house—but there is a talk of his taking another Donna Giulia with him, when next he goes to Scotland to visit his relations. This second Donna Giulia is far more beautiful than the first Donna Giulia—so at least Ralph Cameron says. But the Marchese shakes his head, and tells them

both "No." Still, all the same, he is too tender a father to cross his daughter's love—too well disposed towards Ralph Cameron to baulk that young painter's hopes—too generous-hearted and liberal-minded, too wise, to expect or demand equality everywhere. If his daughter's birth is higher than that of Ralph's, the young painter possesses at least better parts than have fallen to her lot. It is merely a question of mutual giving and taking, and Don Stefano has sometimes been heard to say that his daughter, in this case, has given the lesser share. It is true there are not many fathers who would admit the fact; but then, as he himself points out, few, happily, have had to learn such a lesson as he was taught on the night of All Saints by Ralph Cameron's Model.





IN SIGHT OF THE MOUNTAINS.

And high overhead,
The wrecks of the combat of Titans were spread ;
Red granite and quartz in the alchemic sun
Fused their splendours of crimson and crystal in one :
And high up and higher, and highest of all,
The secular phantom of snow.

OWEN MEREDITH.



HEY came stumbling softly over the rustling brown leaves, just slipping a little now and then ; for the hill-side was steep, and the brown leaves were half-frozen in places, and there were sundry little chinks and crannies here and there that were somewhat treacherous even to mountain-trained feet ; but if they slipped, they recovered themselves easily again, and pulled themselves up on their four little black legs—for they were, as perhaps you may have guessed, nothing more nor less than a pretty little flock of Pyrenean sheep, with fierce hooked noses, but mild,

gentle eyes, and great soft coats of that long, beautiful white wool, which the country people cut and comb in due season, and afterwards knit into wondrous web-like textures, rightly called "clouds," for they resemble nothing in the world so much as those faint, frail, fleecy mists and films that are for ever rising, and floating, and being wreathed and whirled over and about the shining heads and shadowy feet of yonder glorious mountains.

Nature, it would seem, has a cunning way of impressing her own stamp upon the various productions of her different localities. English things, as a rule, are apt to be somewhat dull and colourless—toned down, as it were, by generations of fogs; whereas the last scrap of Italy, be it an end of ribbon, or a string of beads, or a flower, or a fruit, or a beggar-boy's face, is sure to be full of the brightest tints. Nor is the idiosyncrasy of the Pyrenees less strongly marked. The men have rugged faces, like their own torrent-seamed mountain-sides; the women, as we have said, turn and twist their handicraft into the likeness of clouds; while even the heavy babies, with their shaven heads tied up in *mouchoirs*, or thrust into *berêts*, according to their sex, wear a preternaturally grave and sober air, which well befits the dwellers in this solemn land of storm and mist.

A great white dog followed the sheep. He moved

proudly on his four short legs. He had a coat like a Polar bear. There is an immense amount of dignity about these Pyrenean dogs. The last time I had seen one of the race had been by the side of the Princess Frederica, the eldest daughter of the ex-King of Hanover. This one might have been an ex-king himself—or, say, Don Carlos guiding his troops across the mountains. . . . And then, behind the dog and the sheep came the shepherd-lad.

He was no David certainly, though he was a comely youth in his way. His countenance was not of a ruddy hue; on the contrary, it was somewhat pale and brown. But his figure was tall, straight, and well made. His chin was close-shaven, as seems to be the fashion of chins in this border-land of the Figaro country. His eyes were bent on a book he carried in his hand. It was a large book, full of loose leaves, and the young fellow held it carefully against his breast. As he came nearer, we perceived that he was reading or repeating something out of this book. “Aw, aw”—so the sounds came, very round and emphatic, and then there would be some curious struggles or wrestles with an apparently inflexible tongue. “Is that Basque, I wonder?” said little Daphne Logan, rather impressed. “Not in the least like it,” returned her cousin, Mark Armstrong, very decidedly; “how could you think so, Daphne? Don’t you remember that day at St. Jean de Luz,

when Mr. B—— talked Basque to some of the natives for us, and what a pretty, soft language we thought it?" . . . And then these two happy young people wandered back into one of the few recollections of their brief lives.

Meanwhile the young shepherd passed on. He was still reading out of his book, but his discourse was no more intelligible near than it had been at a distance. In what language was he declaiming? It was not Spanish, we knew; nor Basque, Mark had declared; nor French, certainly; nor even the pretty sing-song, vibrating *patois* of this pleasant Béarnais country. What could it be?

"Perhaps it is English," said Daphne again, in her clear, childish voice. But the idea was received with the contempt it deserved, and we all stood silent for a moment.

We had climbed the hill-side to look at the mountains, and there they lay spread out before us. What a wonderful world it was—all white, and grey, and blue, and steel; "fold heaped upon fold," peaks flashing like stars, slopes glittering with myriads of crystals, fields of ice, walls of snow—all shining in the westering sun. Out yonder the Pic du Midi seemed to pierce the sky; far away to the left glistened the snowy slopes of Bigorre; on the right were the dusky wooded heights that rise above Jurançon. Blue shadows lay on the lower *côteaux*.

Through the plain a great white mist came stealthily creeping. One scarcely noticed the advance it made, and yet it rolled on steadily like an incoming sea. First Billières was won ; then the valley below, and the poplar trees along the Lescar road, and the white houses by the river side. But the heads of the mountains were beyond its reach. There they stood, straining upwards to the sky, their proud heads pure and free, each like Venus Anadyomene—going up out of the sea. The mist was in the sky, too. It was soft and blue, but somewhat dim, as it often is in these mountainous regions. Presently, no doubt, it would grow radiant and translucent, and the mountain peaks would flush rosy-red, and the mist turn pink, and even the little stream trickling away in the plain below would be “stained as with wine, and made bloody ;” and then the sun would sink behind the brown lesser hills (there is a little gap out yonder among the trees, which looks as if it had been cleared on purpose for the sunset), with a blaze and a flare that always sets me thinking of a blast of trumpets. But that time was not yet. All for the present was still and silent, and the tinkle of the little Gave, as it went rippling over its stony bed—a silver thread through a network of poplar trees—was the only sound we heard : for the language of the mountains is—silence ! They speak, indeed—and, ah ! how eloquently to those who know how

to listen!—but they make no sound. Their histories are written on their snow-white pages, and they who read them love them well, but for the uninitiated all is blank. It is the lesser things in Nature that make a noise and a fuss over their own existence. Forests sigh, oceans thunder; but the mountains stand up silent and supreme, and they who would know of their mysteries must first learn their speechless language. And always, in all cases, silence is harder to learn—harder, too, to understand—than is speech or sound.

Well, we stood there, as I said, and looked at the mountains, and were silent for a moment, and tried to listen. . . . And perhaps some vague echoes of those mystic voices might have reached our souls in time, had not the irrepressible Mark been of the party. He, no doubt, thought his own voice better worth hearing than theirs.

“That must be the Pic d’Ossau out yonder,” he began, instructively, “and the Maladetta must be somewhere behind it. And Bigorre lies on this side, and Luchon on the other, and Barèges—where can Barèges be?”—and then suddenly, and to his intense surprise, our young informant found himself completely at sea, and discovered that the Pic du Midi had dropped out of his calculations altogether.

This was a humiliating discovery, Mark Armstrong having always been regarded as an authority in

topography hitherto. And, in truth, he had a real love for and admiration of mountain scenery.

“Where’s that shepherd-fellow?” he cried impatiently. “He ought to be able to help us. If that is the Pic du Midi sticking up yonder, it certainly cannot be the Pic d’Ossau.”

The shepherd-fellow was still meandering down the slope, with his book in his hand. A sharp whistle from Mark brought him to a sudden standstill, however. He looked back, he looked up; he saw the young Englishman standing on the edge of the hill, frantically flourishing his opera-glass (is there not something painfully artificial about looking at Nature through an opera-glass?); and, it being very evident that the flourishes could only be intended for himself, he began slowly to retrace his steps.

He came so slowly, indeed, that Mark waxed more and more impatient. “Quicker—quicker!” he cried in good round English; for, notwithstanding his boasted knowledge of the sound of Basque, he could not twist his tongue into speaking any other language than his own. The young shepherd seemed to understand him. He quickened his steps. He came springing lightly over the rough uphill ground. He arrived beside us breathless and panting.

“Did Monsieur call?” he asked, timidly. And then he glanced round at us all with shy, wistful brown eyes. “Monsieur is English, *n'est ce pas?*

Has he never seen our mountains before ? There is the Pic du Midi standing up right before him ; the Pic d'Ossau is further away, beyond that gorge. I do not know the names of the other mountains. They are all of the *grandes Pyrénées*, and they are all beautiful—oh yes. Ah ! Monsieur has no such mountains in his country, that I know——” And so he went talking on, in a shy, monotonous, pathetic tone ; but he gained courage while he talked, and he asked as many questions as he gave answers ; and when both had come to an end, he still stood beside us, looking on gravely—only not at the mountains, but at us !

The great white dog crept up the slope, and came and lay down silently at his master's feet. The sheep in the hollow below stood still, and nibbled as they stood, apparently nothing loath. The misty tide rolled slowly on through the plain ; shadows crept up the mountain side ; the sun stooped lower over the wooded heights of Jurançon. We ourselves began to think of wraps, and to talk of proceeding homewards ; but the young shepherd by our side never stirred—never spoke.

“ Perhaps he expects a tip,” suggests Mark's mother. She was the invalid of the party, and it was for her sake that we were wintering within sight of these mountains.

Mark put his hand in his pocket. Daphne looked

round quickly. But one glance at the young shepherd destroyed that idea. He was standing still, silent and abstracted. His scarlet *beret* was crushed up between his hands; his book was tucked away under a brown calico shoulder; his bare curly head was thrown back dreamily. He was evidently, for the time, at any rate, in a world where francs and half-francs are not.

What were we to with him? We seemed to have called him up like "a spirit from the vasty deep," and now we knew not how to get rid of him. It is a thing one does continually, and with other things in life besides shepherd boys. We work and pray, snatch and strain after this and that; and then, when at last the desired object falls within our hands, we seem to care no longer for it. Is it that our eyes have grown dim with waiting, or that the desired thing looked only fair when seen in that enchanting distance? Ah! but that is the problem.

Well, it was the wise white dog that delivered us from our present dilemma. He seemed to think it was about time to assert his authority. He blinked his eyes, and took counsel of the waning sun. Then he got up and shook himself; perhaps he shook his master, too—at any rate, he made him start. The book slipped from under his arm; it fell with a heavy thud down on the ground.

It was no bookseller's book—we saw that at a

glance ; it had never passed through a binder's hands. It seemed to be a sort of scrap-book—a collection of odds and ends, torn pages, stray leaves, fragments of newspapers, all jumbled up together, and loosely slipped between two old brown covers. And the most curious part of the whole was that all those fragments, those torn pages and stray leaves, seemed to be in one and the same language—namely, in English !

Was little Daphne right, after all ? Could those peculiar sounds and inarticulate splutterings have been fragments of our native tongue ? Who would have thought it ?

One of the scattered leaves came floating towards us. We picked it up. It was part of a page torn out of the advertisements in " Bradshaw"—" COPENHAGEN, HOTEL KONGEN OF DENMARK. Recommended to English travellers," etc. We read it, wondering what possible use or interest such information could be to our young Pyrenean shepherd.

Meanwhile the young shepherd was carefully collecting his fragments. He counted them anxiously, and seemed to be trying to arrange them in some sort of order.

" Ah ! voila C," said he, in a tone of satisfaction, as Daphne held our rescued fragment out towards him.

" But what do you do with all those papers ?" she

asked, watching him sort, and re-sort, and sift them again and again.

"*Je les apprends, Mademoiselle,*" he replied, complacently, and not without a slight accent of pride.

"You learn them!" repeated Daphne, astonished.
"You understand English, then?"

"*Je m'apprends moi-même,*" replied the young shepherd again. And then he added, rather wistfully, "If Mademoiselle would speak to me in English, I think I should understand."

Mademoiselle was delighted to gratify him. "Have you learnt English long," she asked quickly. And she poked up her pretty little flower-like face, and waited for an answer.

But none came. The young shepherd had thrown up his head too, and looked prepared for anything. But, alas for the vain self-confidence of youth! not a glimmering of the meaning of Daphne's words reached his senses.

"Does English sound like that?" he said, piteously, after a pause. We all felt sorry for him.

"It does sound strange if you are not accustomed to hear it spoken," said gentle Lady Armstrong, in her soft, slow tones. "Shall I ask you the question in French, and then you can answer it in English?"

The young fellow's face brightened at this suggestion; but when he heard the question, it grew dark and gloomy once more.

“Ah!” he said, with a great sigh, “that is not in my book. Nevertheless, I will try.” And try he did, in the most praiseworthy manner.

He turned to his scrap-book once more, and took from thence what seemed to be a most precious treasure. It consisted of a single torn leaf out of some old French and English Conversation Book.

The names of the months were printed on it; so were the days of the week, and a few of the numbers in two rows—and there the page was torn off.

“*Monts*,” he said, looking at it. And then with his right hand he began counting on the fingers of his left hand. “One—two—ze—four—” so he went on swimmingly; but at the fifth he stopped short suddenly, and the little finger remained sticking up in the air, like a little caricature of the great Pic du Midi.

“I cannot say that number,” he said, despondently; “it is not in my book. And it is the right number. But it must be long before one comes to *cinquante*,” he added, pointing to the top of his torn leaf, where the second row of figures began with fifty.

“Yes, it is five, is it not?” said Lady Armstrong, kindly. The rest of the party were too much disabled by incipient laughter to be able to speak. “You have been learning English for the last five months; or rather, you have been teaching it yourself all that

time. But you ought to have some books to help you."

"I have these, Madame," he answered contentedly, touching his torn papers in a tender, loving manner.

"And are these all?" asked Lady Armstrong.

"*Mais oui*, Madame. Are they not enough? It took me some time to collect them, it is true, for I could only get a torn leaf or two now and then, as she threw them away. And I have kept them carefully, you see, for I thought perhaps she might some day ask me for them. But now, she never will—she never will," he added, shaking his head sadly.

We had ceased laughing by this time, and were listening to him eagerly. There was evidently a love story to the fore—and who would laugh at love? Even Mark ceased whistling to the mountains, and looked round slightly interested.

"Was *she* English?" asked Daphne, shyly, for the humble shepherd youth had suddenly become to her a hero of romance.

"Oh no, Mademoiselle, she was not English—she was—as I am—of these parts. But why do I say she *was*—she *is* still, I feel sure—only she exists for me no longer." He had began to speak a little wildly, but he controlled himself with an effort, and went on quietly. "May I tell you about her, Mademoiselle? I should like to do so if you will

permit it, for you have a look in your eyes such as I have seen in hers sometimes, when we knelt at mass together, or wandered out on a summer's evening to look at the stars. Besides, you are English; you may have heard of her. Her name is Gracieuse—Gracieuse Lesbal. Mine is Stevan Moras. The people in our village used to say the names went well together—Gracieuse and Stevan. We had known each other from children. I was well-to-do, and she had nothing; but that did not matter. When she went into service, I went into service too, that I might be near her. I served for her, as Jacob served for Rachel. Presently I spoke of marriage, but she would not listen: marriage was such a common thing, she said—almost everybody married sooner or later: she meant to see the world a little, first. And then, about that time an English family came to the inn at Louvie Juzon, where we both served. They took a fancy to Gracieuse, which was not surprising. They asked her to travel with them. She went, of course. As for me, I left the inn too. I could not remain without her. And so, one day, M. le Comte de B—— offered me the charge of his sheep. I liked the work. I had been used to it as a boy on my uncle's property over against Pierrefitte. It would just suit me now, for while my sheep gambolled round me on the hill-side, I should have time to learn my English. And I felt—nay, I feel

still—that I must know something of the language before I go to England, and find and bring back my Gracieuse."

We were all touched by this pathetic little story—Daphne especially so. For one so young (she was only sixteen), she certainly had a great sympathy with lovers.

"How anxious you must be to learn English," she said, softly. And then she turned, and whispered something to her aunt.

Meanwhile Mark was looking on curiously too.

"But whereabouts in England is your Mademoiselle Gracieuse?" he said, in all the Anglo-French he could summon to his aid. "I suppose you have her address."

"Ah *non*, Monsieur," replied Stevan, sadly. "*Voild justement ce qui me manque.* Gracieuse promised to write, but she has never done so. And yet I do not think she has forgotten me."

"Oh no, Stevan, I am sure she has not forgotten you," said Daphne, reassuringly (where did the child get her love-lore, I wonder?); and then she looked round once more, and rather anxiously, at Lady Armstrong.

Lady Armstrong explained. Daphne thought she would like to try and help Stevan Moras to learn English, if Stevan Moras thought he would like it too. The arrangements were to be these: Stevan

Moras was to wander about this hill-side every fine afternoon, and Daphne was to find her way thither whenever she could. Would Stevan agree?

Would Stevan agree? His face flushed, then paled again; his eyes filled with tears—the next moment he was down on his knees before the English ladies, murmuring broken sobbing words of pleasure and gratitude.

Pastoura, the dog (we learnt his name soon after that), gave a short contemptuous bark. He was not accustomed to seeing his master in such a position. Mark turned away, and began whistling softly to the mountains again. He was not accustomed to such sights either. The sun sank lower over the *côteaux*—the mist began to creep up our hill-side. Lady Armstrong shivered.

“Mother, mother!” cried Mark, in an agony, “it is getting too cold for you.” And Daphne began wrapping her round with cloaks.

Stevan Moras volunteered to show us a short cut down the hill to the spot where we had left the carriage that was to take us back to Pau. We followed him gladly, and the sheep followed us. The short cut was a good one, and we found our carriage at once. We parted firm friends, Daphne promising in return to show Stevan a short cut to the attainment of our English tongue.



PART II.

DAPHNE kept her word. Stevan Moras was a diligent pupil, and Daphne, I imagine, a most encouraging teacher. The progress made seemed wonderful: to be sure the advantages were great—a daily lesson, and from such a teacher. Then, too, the circumstances of the case were favourable. Stevan had no genius, but he had a great love, which was better. What one learns with one's heart, one seldom forgets with one's head.

Mark was away. He had crossed the mountains, and gone into Spain, leaving the ladies of his party, and most of his luggage, safe at Pau. His mother suffered from occasional spasms of anxiety about him—when his letters were a day later than she had expected—when there was any special news about the Carlists. But, on the whole, he was a good boy, and wrote continually. He was not enthusiastic about the Spanish *posadas*, but everything else seemed to fill him with delight—the dark-eyed girls, their grave courteous elders; the won-

drous Moorish towns ; above all, the glorious mountains.

“ He wrote of their white raiment, the ghostly capes that screen them,
Of the storm winds that beat them, their thunder-rents and scars,
And the paradise of purple, and the golden slopes between them,
And fields, where grow God’s gentian bells, and His crocus stars.”

Daphne used to take these letters sometimes, and read them to her pupil. I wondered what interest they could be to him, but he evidently liked them greatly. “ Is there no letter from Monsieur to-day ?” he would say, quite disappointed when Daphne arrived empty-handed. “ Ah, if it were only my turn now to show one to Mademoiselle !”

“ You must go to England, and get your news there, Stevan. Seeing people is so much better than hearing from them,” says the knowing little teacher.

“ Oh yes, Mademoiselle, no doubt,” replies Stevan, with a sigh. “ But then I should have to leave the mountains ; and I do so love our mountains. She loved them too, once.” And then he added, after a pause, “ Mademoiselle will think me silly ; but I cannot help fancying sometimes that Gracieuse may be sick for a sight of our mountains, and that is the reason she does not write to me from England.”

Mademoiselle, however, it appeared, did not think him at all silly. I am afraid I laughed when the remark was repeated to me, but Daphne flared up. "People *do* know when those they care about are in pain or trouble, however far away and out of sight they may be," she said, huffily. "Now Mark——"

"What, Mark!" cried I. "You don't imagine he possesses any such transcendental feelings, do you?"

"Isn't there a letter from Mark to-day, Auntie?" cried poor little Daphne, flinging herself over Lady Armstrong's sofa.

"Not to-day, dearie," she replied, gently smoothing the child's hair. "Don't tease her, Hetty."

If there was no letter that day, there was one the next, which sent us all into a flutter of excitement. Mark had had an adventure. "With the Carlists?" I asked. "With brigands, thieves, murderers?" cried Lady Armstrong. "No, no—only with a girl at an inn," laughed Daphne, to whom the letter was addressed. That sounded exciting, didn't it?

And then the child began to read her letter.

"He writes from Venasque," she said. "He is on his way back. There are lots of descriptions of the places he has passed through, but I shall miss all those, because I want to tell you about the adventure. Ah! here it begins. 'I arrived here yesterday. It is a wretched and dirty place, as Murray says. Very few English stop here. I glanced at the

visitors' book soon after I reached the *posada*. There were only two English names in it. One was that of a mining engineer, who inspects the mines periodically; the other was a Colonel and Mrs. Young, who had remained here two nights some five months ago. The *posada* itself, however, is no worse than many others, and Pedro Ferras' *vino Rancio* is excellent. I was drinking some after dinner last night when the *huespeda* came up to me in a mysterious manner. "*El señor* is English," she said, much as if she had been accusing me of a fault. I nodded cheerfully, and did not feel myself much to blame. "There is another English person here," she continued, severely. She is a servant. She was left behind by an English family. She was ill then, and there was money enough left to pay for her illness, and to join the family at Gibraltar, whither they were bound. Yes, there was money—that must be allowed. But she was ill so long, you see. The money is all spent. Not a single *peseta* is left. And, now she is well, she wants to go—but how can she travel without money? And she will not write to the family at Gibraltar. She says she has no claim upon them. So we are obliged to make her work to pay for the food she costs us. And sometimes we suspect that she is not English at all, although she will not answer when we speak to her in good Spanish or French. But perhaps if

el señor would speak to her, he might advise her, and us too, what to do."

"*El señor* was willing enough to speak to her. It was some little time since he had an opportunity of using his own dear mother's tongue, and he rather rejoiced at the chance. "The other English person" was discovered carrying a pail of water on her head. She had bare feet, but was otherwise attired in a short petticoat, a loose jacket, and a bright yellow handkerchief twisted round her rough hair. Her face was thin, and pale, and shrunken: her eyes had a sort of suppressed fire and passion in them that attracted me at once. She evidently understood quite well when the landlady told her in a mixture of Spanish and French that I was an English gentleman who would honour her with a conversation. But she did not appear to be overjoyed at the prospect.

"I began insidiously, but she rejected my advances. She made no answer. She stared at me blankly. It was the scene with your friend Stevan Moras over again. I repeated my words more and more emphatically. But not a glimmering of their meaning seemed to reach her mind.

"At last the truth came out. She was not English (I cannot say I ever thought she was), she was French: she was Béarnaise: she was from the other side of the mountains. But she had wanted

to see the world, and so had entered the service of an English family. She had thought they were returning to England, but it turned out they were only going as far as Gibraltar. And then she had fallen ill on the road, and had to be left behind at Venasque. And when she got well again, she could not rejoin the family at Gibraltar, because she had no money, nor could she go back again over the mountains, for the same reason—and also because—because—

“‘Because she had a lover there, Daphne, whom she was half-anxious, half-ashamed to meet again—because she had had a wild temper, which, however, she thought her illness had tamed—because, yes, above all, because she comes from Louvie Juzon, and her name is Gracieuse !’”

When Mark Armstrong returned to Pau, a few days later, I could not help asking him whether he had engaged a lady’s maid for his own particular use. A neat little woman came clattering after him, carrying his portmanteau and hat-box. She wanted to unpack his things, too, and would have liked to black his boots. But Daphne carried her off, and made her sleep in the room next her own, that night; and the next morning she took her out for a bracing walk on the hill-side.

I was not allowed to accompany them. “You are

such a scoffer, Hetty," said the experienced little Daphne, shaking her head. So of course I have not an idea what happened. All I know is, that Daphne returned alone, and sooner than I had expected, but looking as happy as a lover herself.

Later in the day, we were standing by the window, watching the sun set, and the moon rise over the mountains. The sun had sunk with a flash and a flare, and a dazzle of crimson and gold: the moon was rising slowly through a sort of holy haze. Thus the fashion of this world passeth away, and old things give place to new.

"There they are!" cried Daphne, suddenly. "I hope they are all coming in."

I hoped not, sincerely, if the "all" meant a dozen or so stragglers who were still pacing up and down the terrace with muffs and parasols, cigars and camp-stools, and various other appliances for mitigating the mutations of this changeable world. Fortunately, however, these were not Daphne's "all."

Her "all" consisted of Stevan, and Gracieuse, and Pastoura, who had already come in, and were standing before us.

They all looked extremely sheepish, especially Pastoura, who might have been considered the *deus ex machina* of the whole affair. They appeared to have been struck dumb too; but that did not alarm

me much, for I remembered under certain circumstances even donkeys had been made to speak.

Nevertheless, the prolonged silence became embarrassing. I determined to break it.

"I suppose you are ready to go to England with us, Gracieuse?" I said to the girl, who stood glancing timidly from Mark to Daphne, and back again. "We start next week, you know."

The girl's dark eyes filled with tears. Daphne darted an indignant look at me. Stevan flushed a little, and then spoke out like a man.

"*Non, Madam,*" he said, drawing the girl's hand across his arm, "we are neither of us going out of sight of our mountains any more. You see, even looking at them from the other side made Gracieuse ill. It is the same with all mountain-born folks, I have heard,—with the Swiss—even with a people of your own, called the Scotch,—so Mademoiselle Daphne has told me. The mountains—they are our friends, our guides, our priests. They stand up and preach to us in their snowy white albs. We think of God as we look at them: we believe in love, in faith, in eternity, With you it is different, of course. You can love one another, and be happy" (here it seemed to me that he glanced somewhat slyly, but very gratefully, at Mark and Daphne), "and never think of the mountains. But we—we cannot live without them—*n'est ce pas*, Gracieuse?"

The moon had got clear of the haze by this time, and was sailing away serenely over the star-spangled sky. A long silver beam came streaming into the room. It struck right against the wall behind the girl's head. She stood there, for a moment, "dilated like a saint in ecstasy," and then the moonshine seemed to absorb them both, and they vanished from out of our sight.

I never saw them again.

We left Pau the following week, as I said, and I have never returned there. Some friends of mine, however, were there some two years later, and they gave me of its news. The mountains were unchanged, of course; but other changes there were in the town, in the neighbourhood. There is a new hotel on the terrace near the Chateau. There is also a new inn on the road to Bizanos. It is a poor place, but clean and tidy. Festoons of some green creeping plant are trailed across its windows. A little laurel tree grows by the door. It is dedicated to *LES VOYAGEURS ANGLAIS*, but a laurel branch is painted over the door as a sign. *My* voyageurs Anglais were passing by one day, and being curiously inclined, they peeped in. A great white dog lay just inside the doorway. On a chair in the kitchen a familiar-looking scarlet *beret* reposed comfortably. Some one started up as they entered—some one with a baby in her arms,

and a cry of delight on her lips—"Ah, Monsieur Mark!—ah, Mademoiselle Daphne!" (I had forgotten to say that those were the names of my travellers, and that, to my unbounded astonishment, they had one day discovered that their names went together as well as those of Gracieuse and Stevan in the Pyrenean village)—"welcome back, welcome back. *Holdà ! Stevan, viens voir.* They have returned, they have come back. Ah! we always said you would do so some day, Monsieur et Madame." And the unblushing little woman executed as profound a salutation as was possible under existing circumstances.

Stevan had entered by this time, and was paying his respects to Monsieur et Madame. "Eh, she's a clever one," he said, pinching his wife's ear. "She has travelled—she has seen the world—she always knew what was going to happen when it had happened."

"*Non, non, Stevan,*" retorted his wife. "It was thou thyself who didst tell me of this—thou who hast learnt English without ever losing sight of our mountains."

And the people of Bizanos say that all the conjugal disputes between Monsieur and Madame Moras always begin and end in this same manner.



RACHEL: A Portrait.

“ERE'S Rachel,” said Cecil Faulkner to his friend, Frank Brymer, as he pushed open the church-door. And some one came out of the shadows towards the two young men.

It was a country church, small, narrow, high-pewed, low-roofed, and possibly rather gloomy on ordinary occasions. But to-day it looked bright and gay. There were crowns of golden gorse on the carved pew-heads—there were long lengths of ivy trailing over the floor, even the old grey pillars seemed to have burst forth into some sort of spring-tide greenery—the altar gleamed with snow-white flowers. There was to be a wedding to-morrow—Mr. Cecil Faulkner's wedding, in fact—and Brymer had come down from London to be best-man on the occasion.

Brymer had just been introduced to a bewildering number of his friend's new relations. To Mrs. Carnegy, a pretty, pale, gentle-faced invalid, who had never recovered the death of her eldest son—so Cis told him; to Colonel Carnegy, the jovial, kindly, open-hearted, open-handed squire; to the beautiful blushing bride herself; to aunts, cousins, sisters innumerable; and, lastly, to Rachel, the eldest daughter of the family, and the decorator of the church in question. After the ceremony of introduction, Faulkner had forthwith forsaken his friend.

Mr. Brymer and Miss Carnegy remained standing silently face to face.

“Could I help you?” said Brymer at length, a little nervously. He was not exactly what is called a lady's man—at least, so said his friends; neither was she a gentleman's girl apparently, for she made no attempt towards opening the conversation. Still, it seemed so absurd to be standing there in the church-porch like a couple of mutes.

Miss Carnegy looked up as Brymer spoke, and led the way through the church into the little vestry. There, side by side with the suspended surplices, fluttered a variety of wreaths and garlands in divers stages of completion. Brymer's heart sank at the prospect. “There seems to be a great deal to do,” he remarked, despondently; “and are you quite single-handed, as the servants say, Miss Carnegy?”

"The children were here all the morning," she replied, with rather a tired little smile, Brymer thought. "Blanche and Beatrice and Evy have only just gone. They ran away when they heard Cis had arrived. Perhaps they will come back presently—at least not Blanche, you know, but the others."

Blanche, Brymer knew, was the bride-elect; the other names were mere sounds to him.

They worked on in silence; she, gravely directing his movements, he, bungling away with clumsy, awkward fingers. Every now and then he caught sight of her face, as she lifted it up from her work for a moment. It was not exactly a pretty face, and yet Brymer could not help liking to look at it somehow. It was pale and sallow-cheeked, with blue eyes, a clouded brow, and rather a sad, tremulous mouth. But it had, as it were, a story in it—a strange, wistful, untold, unfinished story. So at least it seemed to Brymer. And by-and-by he found himself wishing that he had the skill, which some folks have, of evolving a life's history out of a single glance at a face.

Just when the day's shadows were deepening into night's shades, and Brymer was on the point of proposing a grand fusee illumination of the church (other means of lighting it there were none, apparently), another of Faulkner's future sisters-in-law

came in. This one was much younger, brighter, prettier than her sister, and yet there was a great likeness between the two. Only the younger one had no story in her face. That was yet to come.

“Mr. Brymer has been doing your work for you, Beatrice,” said Rachel, by way of introduction. She was not sure whether a similar ceremony had not been already effected at the house; and to speak the truth, Brymer could not have enlightened her on that point himself. He bowed, however, and Beatrice smiled.

“I have been doing your work very badly, I am afraid,” said Frank, rather drearily.

“So I see,” replied the girl, with a pretty little rippling laugh, which not even the sacred precincts of the vestry could repress. And then with her dainty little fingers she began pulling out some of the leaves and flowers which the young man’s heavy hands had hammered down.

Dainty was just the word for Beatrice. She was dainty in every movement. She went down the church, after a while, caressing the flowers, so it seemed, and imparting a fresh grace to them with every turn and twist of her little hands. And then, by-and-by, she went tripping back to the house, across the lawn, a dainty little figure with a long thin shadow zig-zagging before her in the moonlight.

Rachel was not dainty. Brymer could not help feeling that, as he walked home beside her. She moved heavily, dragging her draperies after her with a sort of weary grace. Indeed in most of her movements there was something awkward, uncertain, wayward: reminding one rather of a blind man groping his way. And perhaps the truth was, there had not been too much light in her life hitherto.

They danced that night at Carnegie House. Rachel played for the rest. She was quite a different person when she was seated at the piano. No more stumbling, or tripping, or false steps, or hastily drawn-back advances. Her fingers flew along the notes. Valses, quadrilles, lancers seemed to spring up under her hands like flowers in the sun. It was a very simple affair. Faulkner and his friend were the veterans of his party. The rest were mere children. To-morrow's bride was only eighteen. Little dainty Beatrice was barely seventeen, and had never been to a ball in her life.

All the Carnegys married early, so she confided to Brymer. Charlotte, the next sister after Rachel, had married at seventeen. Phil, the eldest son (now poor Jack was drowned), had taken unto himself a wife the day he came of age. She hoped she herself would marry at seventeen. And then she looked up into Brymer's face with a smile that ought to have made any young fellow propose on the spot.

Any young fellow, that is, who was ten years younger than he was himself. So, at least, thought Brymer.

"But—but—your eldest sister," said he, stammering. "She is an exception to the family rule, is she not?"

"Oh, Rachel—yes—but she's different, you see," replied Beatrice, complacently. "She has never been the same since poor Jack's ship was lost at sea, you know."

Was that the story then? Brymer wondered. Was it sorrow for a brother's fate that had weighed down that girlish figure, and made the shadows creep too soon over that fair young face? Somebody said the other day, a woman's story must always be a love story. Well, here was love of the purest, tenderest, most sacred kind.

"Was he drowned?" asked Brymer, much interested.

"That we never knew, and that was the hardest part of it," replied Beatrice, volubly. "The ship in which Jack served was never heard of after it left Portsmouth. It was supposed to have gone down in a gale of wind with all hands on board. Or perhaps it was burnt—think how horrible—a fire at sea." The girl was evidently a little awed by the vision her imagination had conjured up, but she scarcely seemed touched at all.

"And how long ago did this happen?"

Beatrice paused to think.

"Oh, ever so long ago," she said at length. "I can only just remember my brother Jack, and Mr. Hay, his friend, who used to come and stay here when Jack was at home. They were on board the same ship, you know. And I can remember Mr. Hay giving me a present on one of my birthdays—my birthday is the same day as Rachel's, only she is seven years older than I am—and then he and Jack went away the next day. And I think I was ten years old that birthday—yes—I am sure I was—so that would make it seven years ago," cried Beatrice, struggling triumphantly out of her calculations.

"Seven years ago!" repeated Brymer. "And is your sister only twenty-four now? She looks much older," added the young man, involuntarily.

"Do you think so?" cried Beatrice, in amazement, as if it were impossible to be, or to look older than twenty-four. "Did you really think she was more? I hope——"

"You hope when you are twenty-four you will not be still Miss Carnegy, playing away valses and quadrilles to a whole troop of younger brothers and sisters," said Brymer, laughing. "And yet you might do worse things, you know." Whereupon they whirled round once more to the pleasant music of the Miss Carnegy of the present.

I am not going to describe Cis Faulkner's wedding. Everybody can imagine that for himself or herself. The bride looked lovely, of course; so did the bridesmaids. Rachel was not among them. There were plenty of younger sisters, cousins, nieces to perform this duty, and Rachel was wanted in a hundred other ways. It was she who had to marshal the guests, to arrange the bridesmaids, to sign the register, to find the favours, to pin on innumerable veils, wreaths, bows, that seemed but loosely attached to their lawful owners—to remember everything other people had forgotten. Every moment some one was calling for Rachel to do something. It seemed as if no one else could be trusted with the merest trifle. And so she went on, flitting about from one to another with her sweet careworn face and kind wistful eyes, and making Brymer wish for once he were an artist, and could paint a picture of her now, just as she was, as Traddles' Sophy among her sisters. Only, this poor Sophy, alas! had not even a Traddles.

As best-man, Frank Brymer, of course, had charge of pretty Beatrice, the best bridesmaid, as he called her. They went marching out of church and in to breakfast, arm-in-arm. It was an old-fashioned, sitting-down breakfast. Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves. Toasts were given and responded to merrily. The bridegroom's face shone like the

mid-day sun. The bride cut the cake with an unfaltering hand.

“There’s a ring in the cake,” whispered Beatrice to Brymer. “Papa always has one put into a wedding-cake. I wonder who will get it. Last time, at Charlotte’s wedding, Blanche got it, and the token has come true, you see.”

“So it has,” replied Brymer, laughing.

The cake was cut up into little square pieces, and handed round. It came in due course to Beatrice—she helped herself to one piece; then, suddenly perceiving another bit with more almond in it, the greedy little puss changed her mind. She blushed a little when she saw her neighbour had observed her.

“I shall take the piece you discarded,” said Brymer.

“Yes, do,” she replied, contentedly.

When Brymer broke his piece open, however, there was something harder than almond inside it. A little silver ring fell out. Beatrice burst into a shriek of mischievous laughter.

“It’s yours by every right,” said Brymer, rather testily. “You chose the piece first.” He hated silly, childish jests of this sort.

“But you took it,” replied Beatrice, still laughing. “Well, we both took it, if you like that better. The same fate is evidently reserved for us. . . .”

And then suddenly the meaning of her words struck her, and she turned her head away, and blushed furiously.

Meanwhile, everybody was looking at them. "Who's found the ring?" cried Colonel Carnegie's jovial voice. "What, *you*, Brymer?" said the gay bridegroom, with his loud ha-ha! "You, the sworn bachelor—the lady-hater? Here's your very good health, old fellow, and hers too—whatever she may be. Dearest Blanche, you must drink Brymer's health too. Here, everybody, drink to 'Benedict, the married man.'"

Benedict the unmarried man made a very lame speech in return. He was mentally hoping the Beatrice by his side had never read "Much Ado About Nothing."

Most of the party met again shortly in London. The Faulkners returned from their wedding tour; the Carnegys came up for the season. Beatrice was presented. She had her fill of balls and parties. It was pretty to watch the child's enjoyment of it all. Her eyes danced in time with her feet; her lips were for ever rippling over with pretty little babbling words and merry little gusts of laughter. Even Rachel caught the infection sometimes, and laughed too. Generally, however, she sat still, and looked on with grave, sweet, cloudy eyes.

"Why does your sister come to these frivolous entertainments?" said Brymer to Beatrice, at a ball one night. "She does not seem to enjoy them much."

"Ah, no!" replied the little queen of the evening, with a half-smothered sigh. "But Papa likes her to come, you see. He says he cannot take out one alone. He always wants to go off to talk or play whist with some of his friends. It *is* rather hard upon Rachel, is it not? But she won't have to do it next year, you know. Evy will be out then."

"But she will have to do it next year, and with Evy too," said Brymer with a smile. "That is—if you persist in carrying out your present intention of marrying at seventeen."

Poor little Beatrice, why did she start so as he spoke? She slipped away out of her partner's arm, and refused to dance with him any more that evening. Brymer wondered a little at her fickleness, but, after all, it was the way of the world and of women, and he did not trouble his head much about her.

It was not very often that he asked her to dance. Like Philip Firmin, Francis Brymer was *infrequens* of balls, and his meetings with the Carnegys usually took place at picture galleries, or concert rooms, or such-like scenes of quiet dissipation. Once they all went down the river in a procession of boats.

"How delicious this is!" said Rachel, in her soft,
P

low voice. "I think I should like to live in a boat. It would be such a pleasant, easy, gliding sort of life."

There seemed to be more light in her face somehow to-day. It was a sweet, changeful, tremulous sort of light, and it might be merely the effect of the sunshine, or the reflection of the water, or the motion of the boat, as it went swaying and swinging in and out of the long quivering shadows. But whatever might be its cause, Brymer noted its existence. He was in the boat with Rachel. Beatrice was in another boat, just behind, with a whole crew of young guardsmen. Every now and then one could hear her pretty, clear, ringing voice trilling through the air, like a ripple of water off the rowers' oars.

"So you think it would be pleasant to spend one's life in a boat," he said to Rachel. "But there are ups and downs on the river too—locks, for instance. We are coming to one now."

"Are we?" she said, with a certain amount of curiosity. "I have never been on this part of the river before. I have never seen a lock. Is it anything very dreadful?"

There was nothing very dreadful about the lock itself, but something rather dreadful happened just before the procession of boats reached it. The boat in which sat Beatrice and her guardsmen suddenly shot past the one in which Mr. Brymer and Rachel were rowing. They were both long, thin, narrow

affairs—a sort of elongated canoe, in fact. The one's stern touched the other's prow. In an instant both were overturned.

It was of no great consequence, however. The boats were close to the shore. Beatrice made a flying leap on to the bank. Brymer caught Rachel in his arms. The man at the lock fished out the rest of the party.

"Why did you not save me too?" asked Beatrice with chattering teeth, as she stood up in her dripping draperies, and faced Brymer fiercely.

"Why, you *are* safe," replied Brymer, rather surprised. The pretty rosy face looked rather sullen for once, he thought, but then that might have been the effect of the ducking.

"Yes—but no thanks to you," retorted the girl.

"Why, before I had helped your sister up the bank, you were standing there," continued Frank in a tone of ex postulation.

"Oh yes, I know," she returned fiercely.

"Your sister has a better temper than you have, I think," said Brymer, rather uncivilly, but the girl's looks and words provoked him somehow.

"Oh yes—I know you think so," she retorted with flashing eyes. And then she marched away into the little cottage hard by, to see what arrangements Rachel had made for drying their damp garments.

Was it a matter of surprise to her?—was it a

surprise to Rachel herself, when, a few days after that adventure on the river, Frank Brymer asked the latter to be his wife? Beatrice's sentiments indeed he had no means of ascertaining. She was away at the time. Change of air she declared was necessary to her after her ducking, and she had gone into the country. Rachel, Brymer was forced to own to himself, did seem just the least bit surprised.

She kept him one day in suspense.

"I must tell you all," she said the following morning; "and then you will judge for yourself, and for me too." . . . Sweet soul, that all was very little. There was a Mr. Hay once—he had been a friend of her sailor brother's—of her own. There was no engagement between them; they were both too young, her father had said. But they believed in each other. Then he had gone away, and had never returned. The ship in which he sailed was believed to have been lost at sea. That was all. Brymer's judgment was given long before her brief evidence was ended.

And so this was the story that was written in her face—this long, weary, monotonous tale of waiting, and hoping, and fearing, and doubting, and despairing at last. No wonder it looked wan and weary at times. Ah! well-a-day, there was another chapter to be added to it now.

For a little while, a week—a day—an hour—

Brymer had no conception exactly how long, this pair were wildly happy. Their marriage was fixed for the beginning of August. It was to take place at the old country home, of course. Just a week before they all left town, Beatrice returned.

Her congratulations were eminently characteristic.

"The ring spoke the truth after all, you see," she said, with a quick laugh. "It is a token that never fails. And yet, how you hated it at the time, do you remember?"

Yes, Brymer remembered. He wondered whether she remembered it all too. He repeated the old foolish jest about marrying at seventeen. Beatrice turned from him with indignant eyes.

There was one more entertainment to be endured before the Carnegys left London; the last spark from the smouldering embers of the now dying season. It was a garden party given by a Mrs. Buchanan, who was famous for collecting celebrities of all kinds within her grounds. How she managed it, nobody knew, perhaps even she herself scarcely knew; but certain it is, that everybody who was somebody had, once at least in his lifetime, to pass through Mrs. Buchanan's Exhibition. There, flitting about the winding garden-ways, might be seen Indian princes, resplendent in jewels and cloth of gold, Persians in their fezzes, ministers in their ribbons and orders. All the four corners of the earth seemed

to be represented within the borders of that little garden. It was even whispered that Mrs. Buchanan had once received a Maori chief. As for literary and artistic folk, they were as plentiful as thorns on a rose-bush—there were poets with wild eyes and unkempt hair, painters with large, strong, nervous right hands, clever women of every form and fashion. There would also be, on occasions, the Senior Wrangler of the year; the stroke of the successful University boat; the owner of the winner of the Derby; the man who had changed his religion four times, who had married five wives, who had had twenty children, who had run through a dozen fortunes, who had made one out of sixpence, who had just come back from the war—the desert—the North Pole—what not—all was fish that came to Mrs. Buchanan's net, and very queer fish some of them were too. To do her justice, however, she was equally affable towards the common, humdrum, everyday sort of people, who could be no credit at all to her show.

Of these latter class, it must be owned, were the Miss Carnegys, and Frank Brymer, their humble follower. Mrs. Buchanan, however, received them with all her usual excited cordiality.

“I have the greatest wonder in the world here to-day, my dears,” she panted, almost overcome by a sense of her own surpassing good fortune. “Imagine a man who was believed to have been dead these

last seven years suddenly reappearing in the flesh. Why, it's almost as good as receiving the *bond-fide* Tichborne."

Rachel's face flushed a little. Beatrice looked round curiously.

"Was he supposed to have been buried as well as dead?" she asked, drily.

"My dear, he was supposed to have been drowned," replied Mrs. Buchanan, with much solemnity. "He went to sea in that ill-fated ship the L——. I daresay you never heard anything about it—you must have been mere babies at the time; but it made a great sensation in England—its mysterious fate did, I mean. Well, it appears the ship was lost in a gale in the South Pacific, and this young fellow drifted about on a raft for some days. Eventually he was picked up by some Otaheite Islanders, who were very kind to him, but who would not let him leave them. At last he found means to escape, and here he is—or rather *there* he is, out in the garden recounting his adventures. Oh! he is quite the hero of the day——"

"And his name is——?" asked Rachel, tremulously.

"Oh, let me see—Hay, I think—yes, Lieutenant Hay."

Brymer had guessed it, Rachel had known it, long before either question or answer were spoken.

At this moment, a tall, handsome, bearded young fellow came tramping in through the open window. He uttered a cry of delight on seeing the sisters, and then rushed upon them like a young bull.

"Rachel, Rachel," he cried, seizing hold of Beatrice, who happened to be nearest to him. A residence among the South Sea Islands does not improve one's manners, Brymer observed to himself.

He turned away and left them. He himself was a small insignificant man, and he felt doubly so in the presence of that young giant. He did not think Mrs. Buchanan would perceive his absence, and he felt sure Rachel would not do so either.

When he got back to his room, he sat down with his elbows on his table, and his hand over his eyes, in the attitude of a poet undergoing the throes of composition. Presently he dashed off the following note:—

DEAR RACHEL,

When Jacob won at last your namesake of old, the twice seven years he had waited for her "seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." May it be so with you and your Jacob, my dear. God sent you a weary trouble, now He gives you a great joy to wipe away the remembrance of that trouble. Do not think of me. I would not have had it otherwise. I shall suffer—yes, I do not

deny that. There never was a great joy born into this world without being heralded by a cry of pain somewhere. But I shall learn to be happy by-and-by through knowing you are happy. Believe that, Rachel. And believe me also,

Always your faithful friend,

FRANCIS BRYMER.

P.S.—If things are as I think they are, silence is sufficient. Should I chance to be mistaken, let me hear from you within a month's time.

Francis Brymer started for Yorkshire that night. He set his house in order. When the long, weary, silent month came to an end, he gave notice that it should be let.

He had been a great traveller in his day, but there were still new tracks to be trodden. There was the sources of the Nile to be ascertained ; there was the North-west passage to be discovered ; there was a perilous ride through Persia actually accomplished. Little by little, Brymer felt himself qualified to fill a prominent place in Mrs. Buchanan's Exhibition. By-and-by, he bethought himself of turning his face homewards.

It was five, six, seven years since he had set foot on English soil, and it all struck him strangely at first.

One day, the fancy took him to go down to Carnegy House once more. The family would not

be at home, he thought, for it was the height of the London season. But at least he might hear something about them.

He stopped at a village inn some five miles off from the house to get a trap. The landlord of the inn was conversationally disposed. He answered Brymer's questions readily. "The family *was* at home," he said. "Mrs. Carnegy had died in the winter, and there had been no goings out since. Mr. Colonel was as hale and hearty as ever. His youngest daughter was to be married soon. Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner had a power o' children. Captain and Mrs. Hay, who lived in London, had none. . . ."

"And Miss Beatrice, how is she?" asked Brymer. How the old name seemed to bring back the old times.

"Miss Carnegy, yer means," said the landlord, looking rather puzzled.

"Ah! true, I forget," said Brymer, correcting himself. "She is Miss Carnegy, now. Has she never married?"

"Not she, God bless her," said the old man fervently. "We could not spare her, I reckon. I can't think what the poor folks would do without her. She's always a-going about amongst them. The children call her the pure white angel."

Bravo! little Beatrice, said Brymer to himself. He had not thought to have heard this of her.

As he passed the little church by the roadside, he jumped out of the dog-cart and gave the reins to a boy to hold. The lych-gate was unlocked. The door was open. Brymer stood in the porch and peeped in. How well he remembered it all—the scene of seven years ago—the damp spring day, the wreaths lying about on the floor; the girl rising up in the shadows, and coming towards him.

Some one rose up in the shadows now. Some one came out into the porch, and looked at him with a strange, wistful, scared, surprised smile.

“I thought you would come back some day,” said a sweet low voice. Was that Beatrice’s voice?

Was that Beatrice’s face? Whither had the roses flown then, if it were? Was it—could it be Rachel’s? Nay, but Rachel’s face had always been a cloudy face, and this one was as full of light as a pale spring flower when it first looks up at the sun.

“Beatrice?” began Brymer, enquiringly.

“Beatrice is well,” said the face, still smiling. “She is married, you know. She married Captain Hay two months after he returned to England. Did you want Beatrice, Frank? (a sudden change of voice)—“Did you not want——?” . . .

“Rachel, my Rachel,” cried Brymer, clasping her in his arms. And I do not think till that moment he quite knew how much he had wanted her all his life long.

"But why did you never write?" he asked, a little reproachfully, by-and-by.

"How could I?" she answered, looking up at him with those clear lucid blue eyes, in which he had found his heaven at last. "I had behaved so badly; besides, it was all rather painful. Captain Hay wanted to be loyal to his old memories; but it was clear from the first that Beatrice was the reality of his ideals."

"I am glad it was," said Brymer, stoutly.

"So am I," she answered. And then they clung once more to each other, lip to lip and heart to heart.

There are people whose lives seem full of inverted periods. To them, the seasons run backwards as it were. To them, the sweet warm spring days come inadvertently. No year can be wholly without them, any more than any life can be wholly without them. If they come in youth, it is best, no doubt, because it is more natural. If they come later on, it is well too, for then they are doubly welcome. Rachel Carnegy, I think, began to grow younger, lighter in spirit, brighter in face from the day she became Rachel Brymer.



FROM FONTAINEBLEAU.

“ *E nos délicieux déserts de Fontaine belle eau:*” so wrote Henry of Navarre to his beloved Gabrielle very nearly three hundred years ago; and so, in truth, one might write now—there could be no better description.

Does not its very name suggest the place? Even to those who have never seen it, does not a vision of green glades and rippling fountains; of great waving trees and cool dark shadows; of soft whispering breezes and haunted hunting-grounds—a sense of infinite solitude and silence—rise before their eyes as they hear the name? And if, by-and-by, they are fortunate enough to realise their visions, does not the reality of their former fancies strike them with curious vividness and truth? . . .

I am trying to realise it all as I sit in the forest this morning.

The sun is shining, a little soft wind is blowing,

the lights and shadows are playing hide-and seek among the branches of the trees. Every now and then a sudden shower of leaves comes pattering down on my book, I do not heed them, however; I have better things to read to-day than printed words. The wind sighing among the branches makes a sound like the ripple of a fountain: and there is a real fountain too, close at hand, playing away amid beds of blazing autumn flowers—yellow dahlias and scarlet lobelias. But this I cannot see, except by getting up and turning round. All I can see is a little bit of the great shadowy mysterious forest, with innumerable white roads cutting through it. Sometimes these roads meet and join together, like so many arms of a finger-post. There is one of these finger-posts before me now, “a round point,” as little Yvonne de Richmont, with a foolish longing in her foolish little heart, chooses to call it. Four roads branch out of it; they go this way and that, and they all look green and shady and very enticing, as far down as one can see. But that is only a very little way; a pine tree closes up one, a blue mist shuts in another, the rest twist, and turn, and take sudden bends, and so are lost in the general forest. It seems like a type of our own lives. We try to peer into the future, we try to see our own lives, and those of our friends, rolling out before us, smooth and green, or dull and grey, as the case may be; but it

is only a very little way that we can see, after all, scarcely a single step before us as it were, scarcely even a day into the future; and then the prospect closes up, then there falls a sudden mist, or there comes an unexpected zigzag, and the whole face of the world is changed for us.

Yvonne de Richmont cannot understand the pleasure I take in the forest. "If it were the sea now, dancing and rippling" (she was thinking of the blue waves that wash round the shores of her native Brittany), "I could understand a little; or, better still, if those white roads were crowded *boulevards*, and the stiff trees were tall shops full of pretty things, then I could understand altogether. But the green trees that are always green, and the dreary roads that never lead anywhere, and down which no one passes—bah! *ma cousine*" (with a little shrug of her little shoulders), "how can one find any *distraction* there?" Yvonne de Richmont had not yet arrived at that age when it is thought necessary to gush over the beauties of nature.

It was in vain, therefore, that I pointed out to her that the trees were not always green—sometimes they were brown. *Then* they were always brown, she retorted—or black and bare, as the case might be. She was speaking of the days in a season, not of the seasons themselves. But about the roads being lonely, there she was altogether wrong; a

score of people, at least, would pass up and down them in the course of the day. Sometimes it would be a labourer in his blue blouse, lumping along the woodland ways down which *le bon roi Henri quatre* used to ride so merrily ; or sometimes it would be a group of black-eyed children, sent out to gather sticks to boil the *pot au feu* at home ; or again, it is a forester, grim and stern, in his tight jacket and round cap, with a pouch hanging by his side and a gun in his hand, at the sight of which the children all scamper away into the thicket, just like so many rabbits. Sometimes, too, the gentlemen go to the *chasse* along those paths. They dress themselves in brown velveteen ; they wear gaiters ; they carry big sticks in their hands, and they stride along at a rapid pace. This, even Yvonne admitted, was an interesting sight. Edgard de Richmont, her young cousin, used to go to the *chasse* after this fashion sometimes. But that was ages ago—two years, at least ; and, with the exception of *les promenades à la chasse de ces messieurs*, nothing amusing, nothing remarkable, ever passed up and down these forest roads. So, at least, Yvonne declares.

“ But, *chère enfant*,” said Madame de Jaquemart, folding up a letter she had been reading, and looking round kindly at her little grand-daughter, “ why expect anything remarkable ? Believe me, the happiest ways and times are always the least

eventful. I, indeed, have good reason to know it is so."

"But I should like to know it too," begins Yvonne, a little petulantly. Whereupon Madame de Jaquemart put her hands on the young girl's shoulders, and, looking into her face with those sweet, sad, compelling eyes of hers, says, very tenderly and earnestly, "Ah! Vivi, my child, do not say that, do not say that." And Vivi, spoilt child as she was, dropped her head, and looked ashamed for once.

Madame de Jaquemart was not at all like the popular conception of a grandmother; neither did she resemble an old picture, or a powdered *marquise*, or any of the other objects to which people are apt to be compared now-a-days. She was just herself, and there was no one else like her; even Yvonne would never be what her grandmother had been. The soft brown hair, the sweet dark eyes—these might indeed be bequeathed; but there was a tenderness, a grace, a harmony about Madame de Jaquemart's every movement, every word, that was entirely her own. Her voice was like a strain of strange, sad music, and when she spoke, her eyes dilated and her hands moved as if in sympathy with the language of her lips and eyes.

Her story was a sad one. A dutiful daughter, a happy wife, a devoted mother, a proud grandmother

scarcely six years ago—a few short months sufficed to rob her of all these prerogatives except the last. In the spring of the year, when France was wondering over its *Plébiscite*, and all Europe speculating upon the next move of the Man of mystery, Madame de Jaquemart was mourning her mother's death. Then came the war, the repeated defeats, the terrible siege. All useless mouths were compelled to leave Paris. Madame de Jaquemart and her delicate daughter, Madame de Richmont, found refuge in Brittany. Here, day after day, sad tidings came. Albert de Richmont had been killed on the ramparts; the old baron, his father-in-law, was starved to death. Poor Madame de Richmont sank under this double blow; she died, leaving her little daughter Yvonne, who was then about eleven years old, to her heart-broken mother's care.

Madame de Jaquemart had never the heart to go back again to Paris. Her house had been torn open by an *obus*, her rooms had been pillaged during the Commune; besides which, all her beloved ones were gone, never to return. There was a well-known convent at Fontainebleau. Yvonne might be educated there; she would settle in the old royal town herself, and then she could see the child continually.

Very soon she grew to love the old, dreamy, world-forgotten place. Its soft air seemed to heal and comfort her heart. All its historical associations

served to stir and stimulate her mind. She revelled in its memories. She knew more about the palace than the old *gardiens*, more about the trees than the foresters, more about the place than the oldest inhabitant. Morning after morning, she would call me up to look at the old *château* bathed in the sweet early light. It is always the same. The black shadow of a tree falls against it; the close-clipped acacias throw arches of light on the garden ways; the fountain splashes and dashes; the leaves tremble with delight at growing sunshine. Perhaps, now and then, a vigorous carp makes a sudden leap; perhaps a shower of dewdrops falls over us, as we go brushing through the low branches. But all else is still and silent. And as a background to all, stretches the great forest, black and mystical. One cannot help thinking of Catherine de Medicis and her astrologer. Was it not here that she consulted Ruggiero as to the fate of all her sons?

And then presently we go and wander through the white and gold rooms, and look at the painted ceilings and the entwined monograms. "Here is Gabrielle's cypher," says Madame de Jaquemart, in her soft, thrilling voice. "See, an S with a bar across it, *S. trait*; quite a pretty little pun, isn't it? And yonder is Diane de Poitiers' crescent; hers was a happy name in those days of mythological infatuation. And over our heads is a fresco of Time

asleep—ah! no doubt Time often slept here for those merry monarchs.” Then there is the little theatre. The poor Emperor and Empress used to sit on those gold chairs, with their suite around them on red ones. Madame de Jaquemart can remember that, and she had other stories to tell as well. Rousseau was here once; he came to see a performance of his opera “*Devin du Village*.” But his clothes were old and shabby, and the consciousness of this marred his enjoyment of the honour conferred upon him. There he sat, opposite the king, alternately ashamed of his old clothes, and of his foolish shame concerning them. A great mind should be above such trifles. But cannot one fancy the scene—the strange, proud, sensitive man of whom Lord Byron writes,

His life was one long war with self-sought foes,
Or friends by himself banished,

sitting there uncomfortable and uneasy, while the ladies of the court, in their trains and sacques, and laces and jewels, peeped round curiously at the shabby author? He went away the next day, without being presented to the king.

Voltaire was here, too; but his way of life was altogether different. He was a gentleman of the bed-chamber, but his duties in that respect seemed to sit lightly upon him. He followed as he chose his own pursuits. “*Tous les soirs*,” so he writes from

Fontainebleau, “*je fais la ferme résolution d’aller au lever du roi, mais tous les matins je reste avec Mérope.*” Perhaps he is not the first, as he certainly is not the last, who has found the charms of his own creations greater than those of place, or rank, or state.

“But it was François Premier who was the veritable creator of Fontainebleau,” Madame de Jaque-mart says, as we go down the great curving staircase (we could almost fancy we heard the sweep of the ladies’ trains following us), and into the great quadrangle with its tall chimneys, each one marked with the letter F. “He used to say—‘*Une cour sans femme est une année sans printemps, un printemps sans roses.*’ So all the pretty *châtelaines* came out of their *vieux donjons* in delight, and presently all these rooms and galleries were built to receive them. . . .” And talking thus, we go on, through the court of White House, in which Napoleon bade farewell to his army, and out into the gardens beyond. And perhaps we stop for a moment and look at the great fat carp rolling about in their *bassin*, and listen to the old woman who sits by and sells hunks of stale bread, and repeats, hour after hour, how this fish has been fed by François Premier, and that one by Ninon de l’Enclos, and how all are better off than human beings, seeing they live three hundred years or so, and never have revolutions. She is a charming old woman, and it would be pleasant to linger

beside her for a time ; but Yvonne is waiting for us in the *jardin anglais*, so thither we repair. It is a delicious spot. The willows dip their branches into the water ; the tall trees meet overhead like the aisles of a cathedral ; there is a tangle of pine trees, of statues in the background. “It was from here,” says Yvonne, “that James of Scotland saw Madame Magdaleine and her ladies bathing in the lake yonder ; he set up a mirror, and saw her reflected in it. I suppose he approved of the sight, for he married her afterwards, and took her back with him to Scotland.”

“And what happened after that, Vivi ?” asks Madame de Jaquemart, smiling.

“She died in six months of *ennui*. But then James was a barbarian, and Scotland is a land of snow,” replies Yvonne.

On Sundays, Madame de Jaquemart and her grand-daughter go to mass in the little chapel under the grand staircase of the palace. It was here that Louis Napoleon was baptised, and Elizabeth of Valois married to Philip of Spain. I went there with my cousins once. The ceiling is painted, the walls are all white and gold. A priest in a green vestment bowed before the altar, two little acolytes in red and white knelt beside him ; a bell was rung, the people knelt and crossed themselves ; then came a great burst of music, and the *fonction* was over. The

Protestant service in the Rue de la Paroisse is much longer. The *pasteur* preaches and prays from a little brown box; a lady, in a room adjoining, plays a hymn on the harmonium—the door is set open, and the congregation catch the notes as well as they can, and sing away lustily, albeit in a nasal tone. All this lasts till past noon-day; and when the people come out of their little *temple*, they find the whole town bathed in sunshine.

Sometimes of a fine afternoon we go out for long drives along the forest roads to Thoméry, to look at the Chasselas grapes; to Franchard, to see the rocks and the vipers; or, better still, right into the heart of the forest, where the foliage closes over our heads and shuts out the sky, and the grand old trees have grown into all sorts of fantastic shapes. Madame de Jaquemart has a story for each of them, for Pharamond, for the Siamese twins. And then, when the day is done, we work our way out of the forest once more, and go driving back through the green roads, till presently a sight of the old palace, with its slanting roofs and red chimneys, breaks upon us. And we talk of the royal hunting parties of Francis and his beautiful sister Margaret; of Henry and Gabrielle; of Christina of Sweden with her tricks and pranks, and her air of *joli garçon* though she was past thirty, as Mademoiselle de Montpensier took care to point out. But Christina's story ended

tragically with the bloody death of the Marquis de Monaldeschi, and little Yvonne did not like to hear it told very often.

To-day, however, Madame de Jaquemart seemed to have no stories at all to tell. She sat still, with the letter in her hand, while every now and then the yellowing leaves came down in a sudden shower. The dark trunks stood up straight and tall; there was a strong light shining beyond, through the branches. . . . Madame de Jaquemart sat looking at it. Presently the deep tones of the palace clock boomed out the hour—it was mid-day.

“Have you no story for me to-day, *bonne maman?*” said Yvonne, wondering at this unusual silence.

Madame de Jaquemart’s soft eyes grew softer still. “*Ma chérie!* I think it is thou who art soon to have a story for me,” she says, with a little tender sigh. “Dost thou remember Edgard de Richmont?” For all answer, little Vivi blushes a rosy red. “He is coming to-day,” continues Madame de Jaquemart, with a quiver in her voice; “I have received a letter from him. I think he wants to carry away my little Vivi from Fontainebleau.” . . .

“But she will not go without you, *bonne maman!*” cries Yvonne, melting suddenly. And then she flung her arms round her grandmother’s neck, and sobbed out Ruth’s pathetic words, “Where thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge.”



THE BETROTHAL OF JOYEUSE.

I.

WE were among them at last ! For days we had paced that sunny terrace at Pau, and looked at them, and longed, and declared to our unbelieving relatives that the misty forefinger of the Pic du Midi and the white head of the Pic d'Ossau were beckoning and nodding to us. We had a call to go amongst them—a vocation—a mission ! It is the fashion of this somewhat morbid generation to christen every pleasure a duty. And so, at last, our duty, or our pleasure, came to us simultaneously !

We waited for a fine day. Then we started. The air was crisp, bright, sunshiny. The mountains had put on their fairest apparel. Blue shadows, like the bloom on a plum, lay on their slopes. Many of their heads were covered with snow, and great masses of scarlet and golden foliage clustered about their feet, for it was already late in the year. “To-morrow will

be Advent Sunday," some one amongst us remarked. But we shook our heads, and pointed to the sunshine, and refused to believe it.

Well, we should have the mountains all to ourselves: that would be one advantage of coming amongst them so late. The good folks of Lourdes looked after us wistfully, as we clattered out of their queer, dirty little town. They would like to have kept us, to have made much of us, to have put us through a course of their miraculous waters. But no; we were bound for the mountains!

So we left Lourdes behind us, and drove on between fields of rotting maize-stalks, alternated by patches of bright green flax—just beginning to sprout before the winter came, and the ground grew too hard—past quaint little villages lying on the slopes, and ruined castles upon the hill-tops, and convents standing higher still, their windows glistening in the noon-day sun. And all the time the road grew steeper and steeper, and the mountains wilder and more rugged. We were getting nearer to them, though, with every turn of the wheel. Sometimes the road narrowed, then it widened again. The people at work in the fields looked after us with soft dark eyes. A village *curé* in his shabby cassock came tramping along with the heavy step of his peasant forefathers. He lifted the brim of his broad hat, and wished us a "good-day." Then we crossed

a bridge, and drove along for a time by the side of a little white dashing stream. Presently Argelez was reached, and here, too, the poor landlords of the hotels looked out wistfully. Travellers at this time of the year are rare birds. But they were doomed to disappointment. We went on to Pierrefitte.

Pierrefitte is a typical Pyrenean village. It lies in a little narrow blue valley. The mountains rise all round it, so close and high that they almost shut out the sky.

It has a little street with grey houses on either side; an inn, a post-office, and a tobacconist's shop—all close together, very compact and handy. There is a long white road leading out of it at one end, and a bridge spanning the brawling mountain Gave on the other. The church is on the further side of the bridge; it has a tall, queer-shaped belfry, with a single jangling bell in it, which seems to be kept very hard at work. The people who live here have pleasant dark faces, and kindly grave manners. They made friends with us at once, being very well accustomed to strangers. One young fellow brought his bear to show us. It was a young bear, and he had captured it himself among the mountains. He hoped to make his fortune with it during the winter at Bordeaux. It was already a very accomplished bear, in the matter of worrying dogs, etc. A private performance was here proposed in our honour. But

this we hastily declined, and contented ourselves with shaking a rough and shaggy paw, and offering a trifle towards the fortune that was to be made by-and-by.

There is a road leading out of the village beyond the bridge. It is steep and narrow, and goes apparently up to the skies, and nowhere else. We elected to explore this *chemin du paradis*. The little Gave ran along by our side for a time—laughing, chattering, dancing; one could hardly help thinking of it as a child. Then we took a sharp turn, and left it behind us. The road grew all of a sudden full of zigzags; the mountains seemed to be bearing down upon us; their slopes were covered with golden trees, their heads were in heaven. Another sudden bend, and we came upon an old man cutting wood by the wayside. He took off his cap as we approached. We asked him where the road led to, and he told us to St. Sauveur; but it was far, very far—three, four, five hours' walk at least. Then he asked us questions in return. Were we English? Did we come across the sea? Had we any mountains in our country? Meanwhile we stood still, and debated. St. Sauveur was, of course, out of the question; but should we go on a little further, or turn back at once? The sun was already nearing the mountains, but still the twilight might be long in these regions, and the view a little higher

up was sure to be lovely. So we stood hesitating. Suddenly, out of the bend in the road, came a party of Spaniards. They drove a mule before them; they had long poles in their hands, and knives stuck into the purple sashes that were twisted round their waists. They muttered a salutation, which was probably "*Buenas tardes*," but which sounded ominous to our ears. They went up the mountain road. We crept down again. The little Gave welcomed us noisily as we reached its banks: the long winding road looked lonely and deserted; it was all in shadow now. Presently a lovely yellow glow spread all over the sky. The snow peaks flushed rosy-red, the near mountains grew purple. Everything flashed out for a moment curiously clear and distinct, then it all grew misty and dark. We hurried on, and were glad at last to see the queer-shaped belfry of the little church at Pierrefitte looming through the deepening twilight.

The jangling bell was sounding for vespers as we entered the village. The Angelus had been sung some time before: we had heard it faintly as we clambered down the mountain side. Now, one or two poor toil-worn women were hurrying off for a few moments' quiet in the little dark church; others were standing at their doors, wishing one another a vibrating "*Bong-soir*." Two little girls, their arms round each other's necks, came skipping down the

road. They were our landlord's little daughters, and their names were Kattarin' and Lissandrin'; they were singing a little "*chansong*" in their pretty treble voices, when we ruthlessly stopped them, and gained this valuable information. They stood still, staring at us a little shyly, long after we had passed; and then, presently, they began to sing again—

*Le petit Jésus
Allait à l' école,
Avec sa croix
Sur son épaule.*"

The landlord of the *Hotel de la Poste* was standing in his doorway, looking out, as we entered. He drew back to let us pass, then returned to his former position.

"Are you looking for your little girls?" we asked, seeing he seemed rather anxious. "We saw them just now, in the street close by the bridge."

"I am looking for my big little girl," he answered, with a smile—"for Joyeuse: she is to come back from her aunt, at Luz, to-day. Ah, *señor!*!" he added, saluting a tall, dark, good-looking young fellow who ran up the steps suddenly, said something to our host in a low voice, and passed on into the house.

"Who is that?" we ask, with true British curiosity. We almost grudged anyone sharing the mountains with us to-day.

“That is a young Spaniard,” replied our host. “He is inspecting the mines in this neighbourhood: he has been here many months.”

“And always in this house?”

“Oh yes: always in my house! They say his father is very rich.” . . . This last sentence was uttered in rather a melancholy tone of voice.

We dined in company with the young Spaniard that evening—that is to say, in the same room, for he had finished his dinner before we began ours. He was still sitting by his little round table near the window, however, and he rose courteously as we entered. Then he sat down again, and watched our dinner come in. It consisted of greasy soup, delicious trout, a beefsteak swimming in oil, a wild bird (species unknown, but flavour excellent), some cream cheese, and fresh lettuce—on the whole, more good than bad, as is generally the case with most things in this world. The maiden who served us indeed seemed surprised at us refusing anything. “*Mais c'est très bong, Madame—goutez en, je vous en prie.*” And her thick petticoats went flapping vigorously round the table. The Spaniard seemed to be almost as much amused by her as we were. He watched her continually, or rather the door by which she went in and out. “Mademoiselle would serve the coffee,” she had said, just before she shut the door behind her for the last time. Mademoiselle came in

presently. She had a sweet, shy, downcast face, with a pair of tender brown eyes, and such a pretty tremulous mouth. The coffee was set on a little tray. She handed it to us slowly and carefully. Then she went towards the Spaniard. He rose suddenly. . . . "Come, my dear," said Mr. H—— to his wife, in his kindly, pleasant voice, "don't you think this room is rather hot and close? Suppose we carry our coffee with us upstairs?"

So we stumbled upstairs in the dark, shutting the door behind us.

The moon had risen whilst we were at dinner, and was now sailing away serenely in the deep blue sky. One or two stars are shining too—but very faintly—what chance have they against the moon? The mountains look brown and mysterious in this cold blue light. Far away to the right, they are curiously heaped and massed together, as if they had not been set in order since the creation. Here and there a snow peak comes in, flashing like a star. There is one almost opposite, but this one is round at the top, and smooth as a sugar-cake. The little village street is dark and deserted. Just one light is stirring in the Café du Midi, a little lower down than our hotel. Perhaps they are expecting some late arrival. The roofs of the opposite houses gleam like silver in the moonlight. Ours casts a black shadow across the road. In the direction of the bridge we can hear our

old friend the Gave still babbling and babbling away to itself. But for it, all would be silent. Presently, however, there is a little stir. A man with a lantern comes down the street. He is followed by an older man in a long cloak. They come towards our hotel. Some one is watching for them. It is the young Spaniard. He goes forward—the old man sees him, and quickens his pace. They meet. They embrace. The young fellow takes the lantern from the servant (as he holds it, the light throws up his dark, handsome face), and carefully guides the elder man into the house. We suppose they go into the little *salle à manger*; we suppose they call for something to eat and drink; we suppose they have a great deal to say to one another—for long after we have gone to bed, long after our lights have been extinguished, and that poor little one at the *Café du Midi* has burnt itself out, we hear them still, talking on, talking on.

III.

I do not know whether any of us dreamt of the Spaniards that night. I am only sure that I did not do so. The industrious church bell was ringing when I awoke, and this is the picture I saw from my bedroom window:—

The sun was rising—not that it was really early,

for, two good hours before, "between waking and sleeping," I had heard that same bell jangling away through the darkness, and caught the sound of wooden shoes lumping along the street. But the sun rises late in these regions: he, too, has to climb the steep mountain sides, and the world lies wrapped in mists and mystery till his arrival. He is coming now, and the sky waxes soft and tender-eyed, and the great brown mountain yonder looks important. A clear, faint glow, as it might be the light of a distilled jewel, trickles softly over the opposite slopes. A pale yellow sword-like cloud hovers about the easterly peaks. It is the herald of the morn. Very few people are about, or seem to be attending to the sound of the church bell. Some have already tramped through the darkness to matins at five o'clock; others are enjoying their well-earned slumbers, and mean to attend high mass with their families at half-past eight. Presently, however, the village begins to wake up. A young fellow in slippers, and with a decidedly unkempt head, shuffles down the steps of the *Café du Midi*, and proceeds to unbar windows and open shutters. A country cart comes jolting down the street. It is full of people, women and children packed inside, and laughing and talking their merry hearts out. An old man sits on the box-seat. A young man is driving: he has a flower stuck into his cap, and a

pretty young woman is squeezed in by his side, the rest of the cart being so full. Some one comes over the bridge and looks up at them, laughing, but sympathetically. It is the young Spaniard, and he too wears a little yellow flower in his cap. The driver of the cart laughs back in return, but the young woman blushes, and drops her head. The stout little Pyrenean horse draws them rapidly on, out of the town into the pleasant green fields beyond. The Spaniard stands watching them for a moment from the chill, shadowy street; then, all of a sudden, the sun bursts out from behind the brown mountain, and the whole village, the whole world, becomes to him full of light and warmth.

The little street is bathed in light, and the somewhat dusty windows of the Café du Midi flash suddenly like great diamonds. The slip-shod youth disappears; perhaps he was ashamed for the sun to see him in such a plight. More people come out. The church bell has ceased ringing, but the cow-bells tinkle pleasantly, and all down the valley there is a hum, a stir of waking life. Kattarin' and Lissandrin' patter across the road in their Sunday clothes. They do not look half as comfortable in them as in their every-day pinafores; but *il faut souffrir pour être belle*. A woman in a dark *capulet*, with the hood drawn over her head, comes marching up the street. A little child is clinging to her skirts.

Some men come out, and lounge about in their tight brown Sunday jackets. Then more women go by, some of them with silk *mouchoirs* twisted round their heads instead of a hood—which is a pity, as the capulet and hood give a grave and noble air to the wearer. But even the *mouchoir* is far better than the artificial flowers, and silk, and feathers, which we were sorry to see on some heads. Artificial flowers amid a world of natural flowers always seem to be more than usually out of place. But all this time where was Joyeuse ?

Joyeuse was down below in the little *salle à manger*. I looked in as I passed. She was laying our breakfast. She had piled up a plate of scarlet berries and small yellow flowers in the centre of the table, and was now setting the cups round it with orderly precision. There was certainly a dainty grace and a sort of delicate refinement about everything this girl did.

“ Good morning, Joyeuse !” I cry, from the doorway.

“ Good morning, Mademoiselle !” she returned, a little bashfully. “ It is going to be a fine day for Mademoiselle.”

“ For everybody, let us hope,” said a third voice, in a cheery, but deep tone ; and, looking in, I saw, sitting in a corner, an elderly man, whom I judged to be the late arrival of last night.

It was not fair to interrupt a *tête-à-tête*, so I went out, down the street, through the sweet fresh morning air and sunshine.

A few minutes more, and that industrious bell began to ring again. It was for high mass this time; and out of every door *capulets* appeared, and went streaming in a sort of procession over the bridge. These long dark cloaks and hoods make their wearers look like so many nuns. So much so, indeed, that the other day little Mons. R—, who ought to have known better, took off his hat, and addressed one of them as "*Ma sœur*."

"*Je suis mère de famille*. I have six children," was the somewhat indignant reply.

The husbands of these *mères de famille* at Pierrefitte seem to be following them pretty closely to church. They do not go in, however. Perhaps there is not room for them. Brown backs and gay kerchiefed heads seem to have filled up all the available space. So they stand in a little group outside; and the sound of the priest's voice comes to them, mingled with the ripple of the murmuring Gave, and the sigh of the wind as it breathes up the valley; and the sight of the kneeling congregation has, for them, a background of everlasting hills, and an uppermost dome of spaceless blue sky. Which is best, to worship outside, in the presence of an ever-adoring nature, or inside, between cold stiff walls,

which, beautified, sanctified, consecrated as they may be, are but “the work of men’s hands” after all?

Well, it is a question without an answer, or rather it is a question which everyone must answer for himself alone! We settled that much this morning, as we went up the steep road to Cauterets. There are some people indeed who will give different answers at different times. The one-answer folks may not believe this, but it is true nevertheless. To-day, for instance, this Advent Sunday we spent among the mountains; surely God was present in every snowy peak, in every dashing torrent, in every tall pine-tree, in every tuft of moss we gaze at, on our upward way. But to-morrow, or next Sunday, or next year, in the heart of some great metropolis, He might only be found (so at least it might seem to us) within the walls of some old grey church, or before an altar bright with hot-house flowers and gleaming lights. For the “still, small voice” reaches us in different ways at different times.”

The road to Cauterets is one of the most beautiful in the world. It begins in a narrow defile. The mountains rise up on either side—bleak, and barren, and bare. Overhead there is a fringe of pine-trees, down below, a foaming torrent as white as snow. Then the road travels on, the pine-trees divide, the valley grows wider, the mountains further apart—we get into the sunshine at last. Yon dazzling peaks

indeed seem scarcely any nearer to us than they did when we were down in the plains below; but the plains themselves seem to be about the size of the traced-out shires of a child's map of England, and the little villages scattered along them are but as so many tiny grey dots.

Cauterets was void of visitors of course, but it was, perhaps, all the more pleasing to us on that account. The hotels were shut up; many of the shops had departed; everywhere doors were closed, and shutters were flapping drearily. Long straggling grass was growing in the streets leading to the Establishment; but behind the hotels the great purple mountains were still glowering in the sunshine, and below the Establishment the country people were gathered together, as perhaps they would not have been when all the fashionable world was looking down upon them. There was something exciting going on. A town-crier was making an important announcement. The people had gathered round, and were listening with respectful attention. For ourselves, not being equally interested, we stood back a little, and addressed some of the women also standing outside.

“Had they had a good season?”

“Eh, *non*, Madame,” was the mournful answer. “Scarcely any visitors, and a bad harvest too. It has been bad all through—dry weather for sowing, wet

weather for reaping. There would be no *mistrā* (maize bread) this year, and as for flour——”

Then another woman took up the tune, and struck it in a more cheery key.

“No, the harvest was not good, that must be allowed, but then the season had been good for pigs—she herself had sold two fine porkers to a *marchand* at Bayonne. Last year all had just been the reverse—good for the maize, bad for the pigs: everyone must have a turn;” and then she stroked our gowns gently, and let us touch her *capulet* in return, and told us all about it: how it had cost “*trenta frangs* when new, and how it had been her mother’s before her, and she hoped it would be her daughter’s after her,” for these great cloth cloaks are expected to last three generations.

“But then they are only worn on Sundays and fête-days,” observes Mrs. H—— to her Draco-like husband.

“And at funerals,” adds our cheery friend.

The horses are rested by this time, and we begin our downward course. Everything goes by inverse order: the houses, the streets, the little town itself, the *buvette* dedicated to Calypso on the brow of the hill, the sharp turns and twists in the well-made mountain road. It is long past noon when we get down into Pierrefitte once more. We feel quite at home here now. The queer-shaped belfry looks

familiar, and we are sure we should recognise the cracked tone of that chapel bell among a thousand. Kattarin' and Lissandrin' came trotting out to meet us. They look very important, especially Lissandrin', who, being the least pretty of the two, is generally considered the most sensible. "*Le diner de Madame est servi*," she said, demurely. And then little Kattarin' broke in, "*Our* dinner is over, but we are going to have a brother-in-law this evening."

Our landlord was once more standing in his doorway; but he looked happier in his mind than he had done last night. He came forward to help us to alight.

"Ah, you have heard, Madame!" he said, in answer to our congratulations. "What! those little magpies have told you! Yes, it is true: ma Joyeuse is to become the wife of Señor Francisco Urriguën. I feared at first, because his family is rich, and I cannot give ma fille a corresponding *dot*. So I sent her away, that they might forget each other; but neither did, you see. Joyeuse came back yesterday, and late at night arrives the father of Señor Francisco. So all is arranged, and the betrothal will take place to-night. . . . But I must not detain *ces dames* any longer from their dinner."

We made short work of our dinner, for it was already late, and we had to reach Lourdes that night.

The whole party came out to see us start. It was like the last scene at a play:—Joyeuse standing between her father and her lover; the old man, with his kindly face, behind; the little children in front, playing on the steps, and waving their hands. And so we saw them at the last turn of the road, standing there still, among the mountains!



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